

Among the Dimasa of Assam  
*An Ethnographic Study*

*M. Sibyajodi Barman*

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*dedicated to  
the late Prof Nirmal Bose*

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*Among the Dimasa of Assam  
An Ethnographic Study*

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## Foreword

Purely ethnographic work, these days, has gone out of fashion. This is not as much due to our meeting the saturation point in this respect as it is for our anxiety to jump into the bandwagon of problem-oriented or deductive researches. Such researches are, of course, useful and necessary but not at the total negligence of thorough ethnographic work. In fact, there is no competition but complementarity between the two kinds of researches as the theories have to have the solid foundation of facts. The present study of the Dimasa by itself is an example to demonstrate how imperfect our understanding of theories could be (with particular reference to the descent system) unless we were posted with details of the ethnographic facts. Thus the present work has re-established the credibility of ethnographic researches to a considerable extent.

This, too, is considered important on several other counts. In general our knowledge about and understanding of the tribal societies is utterly inadequate. Comparatively, we know even less about the people of the north-east Himalayas and the adjacent territories. Due to relative inaccessibility and tranquillity of the regions, during pre-independence days the area attracted proportionately less attention. Perhaps on the same count as well as for the recent socio-political developments, the area deserves a deeper interest and involvement of scholars. In this respect also the contributor of this volume has set an example for future researchers and Dr Dipali G Danda deserves our special felicitation as being a lady colleague she was unperturbed by the hazards of the inaccessible field condition.

North-east India and portions of Burma and the adjacent territories of South-east Asia are important for another reason. Relative fluidity of socio-political structure of the cultures necessitates a deeper understanding of the whole situation. The Dimasa political authority though became subjected to multiple



forces of change, has so far not shown any major sign of fluidity. There is, at the most, a certain amount of ambiguity in this respect. But their social structure, particularly, the theories of origin of the matrilineal system, indicates a state of fluidity that deserves a thorough probing. In this respect Dr Dipali G. Danda has made the beginning by carefully recording the facts and it is now the joint responsibility of theorists and empiricists to throw further light on the issue.

The author of the book has not said everything about many aspects of the Dimasa culture. This is not possible either. It is, however, a matter of high gratification that at least something has been said about almost everything of the Dimasa; a tribe known so little to us.

Dr Dipali G. Danda has not dealt with any theoretical issue. She perhaps had no such inclination. Throughout her essays she remained extremely detached in this respect, although the present study provided many scopes for such an exercise. In her postscript, however, possibly due to her inadvertence she touches upon the theory of themes by Morris Edward Opler. Though this appears as a passing reference, it has a deeper implication.

'Patterns of Culture', 'Themes', 'Dominant Drive', 'Style of life', etc., are not very up-to-date topics for discussion in contemporary anthropology. Like ethnographic studies, as indicated at the outset, they have also gone somewhat outdated. May be, largely due to her sheer boldness Dr Dipali G. Danda prefers to delve with both and simultaneously. How far she has been successful in restoring their position of eminence is not very material in this context. What appears important is that she has not only been able to draw our attention to these facts, she also does it creditably.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned in this connection that Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, to whom the volume has been dedicated, while lecturing at Cornell University in 1964, spoke on "Material Trait Survey" that he had organised as a national research project for the Anthropological Survey of India. As one of the members from the audience stopped him to ask whether such studies had not gone out of fashion, Professor Bose's response was a curt simple 'yes'. He was least defensive

about the matter and neither did he feel any necessity for putting up any apology. What he perhaps meant by his abbreviated response is that the change of fashion does not make a substantive contribution irrelevant. Thus the departures made through this study by Dr Dipali G. Danda make this contribution refreshing and a welcome inclusion in the literature of anthropology.

Udaipur  
December 1977.

*Ajit K. Danda*



## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to late Prof Nirmal Kumar Bose who was the source of inspiration for taking up this work and whose advice and guidance contributed significantly to writing the book. I am also indebted to Prof P.K. Bhowmick for his valuable criticism and useful suggestions while drafting the manuscript. In the field, all facilities were provided by Shri Sonaram Thaosen, ex-chief Executive Member, District Council, Haflong and I express my deep gratitude to him. I had many long discussions with Shri Thaosen on the Dimasa and that facilitated my understanding of their life and culture immensely. The field data was collected under the auspices of the Anthropological Survey of India.

Thanks are due to Shri Heramba Thaosen, Teacher of Maibong H.E. School who helped me as an interpreter and to Shri P.K. Mitra who has kindly prepared the photographs of the book.

I am specially indebted to Prof S.C. Dube and Prof B.K. Roy Burman who went through the manuscript and recommended its publication to the ICSSR. Special thanks are due to Shri J.P. Naik, Member-Secretary of the ICSSR for his active interest and support in publication of the report. I may also mention in this connection that views and conclusions drawn in this study are my own.

I am also thankful to Shrimati Radhamony who took immense interest in typing out the manuscript and to Shri Jyotirmoy Chakraborty and Shri Mukul Hazra who helped me in various ways. As it is customary to express gratitude even to the family members I would like to mention that but for the help of my brother Shri Kalyan Majumdar the book would have never been completed. Dr Ajit K. Danda made me particularly indebted to him by writing the foreword of the book in spite of his very busy work schedule.

Dipali G. Danda

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## Introduction

I grew up in a tribal surrounding. During my childhood days I often met the Dimasa and other tribal groups in markets and fairs whose life-way always fascinated me. Still, I, in those days could not venture to visit their villages as they lived in interior forests of North Cachar Hills of Assam. The non-tribals from neighbouring plains had many peculiar notions about tribals. They used to attribute many queer characteristics to them and had a general apathy about them. But the more I heard about them the more attracted I felt to study them closely. My training in Anthropology and job requirement provided me with the opportunity to study them and observe them in their natural setting. The more closely I studied them the more I marvelled at the harmony and beauty of their life and culture.

I undertook the study of the Dimasa culture for writing my Ph.D. dissertation. Initially, I thought of writing my dissertation on a particular aspect of their life; that is, being relatively isolated and located in interior forests how do they react to the advent of cash economy. As my initial contact was through market this aspect of their life preoccupied my thoughts. After some field exposure my attention fell on their descent system which is unique even in the global context. But as my intimacy grew, the Dimasa emphasis on harmony appeared more and more attractive to me. Finally, I decided to make a holistic study of the Dimasa life and culture, with special emphasis on social structure.

During 1964-65, I conducted field investigations in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District of Assam where the Dimasa primarily live. In 1966, I visited them again to supplement the data already collected during the first phase of field work. On one occasion I stayed with the people continuously for six months and the major data was gathered from a set



of four villages; two from North Cachar Hills, and two from Mikir Hills sub-division. Later on a set of six villages was selected from both the subdivisions of the district for cross-checking the information and finding out the extent for variation, if any. The study generally covers the socio-economic, political and religious organisations of the people.

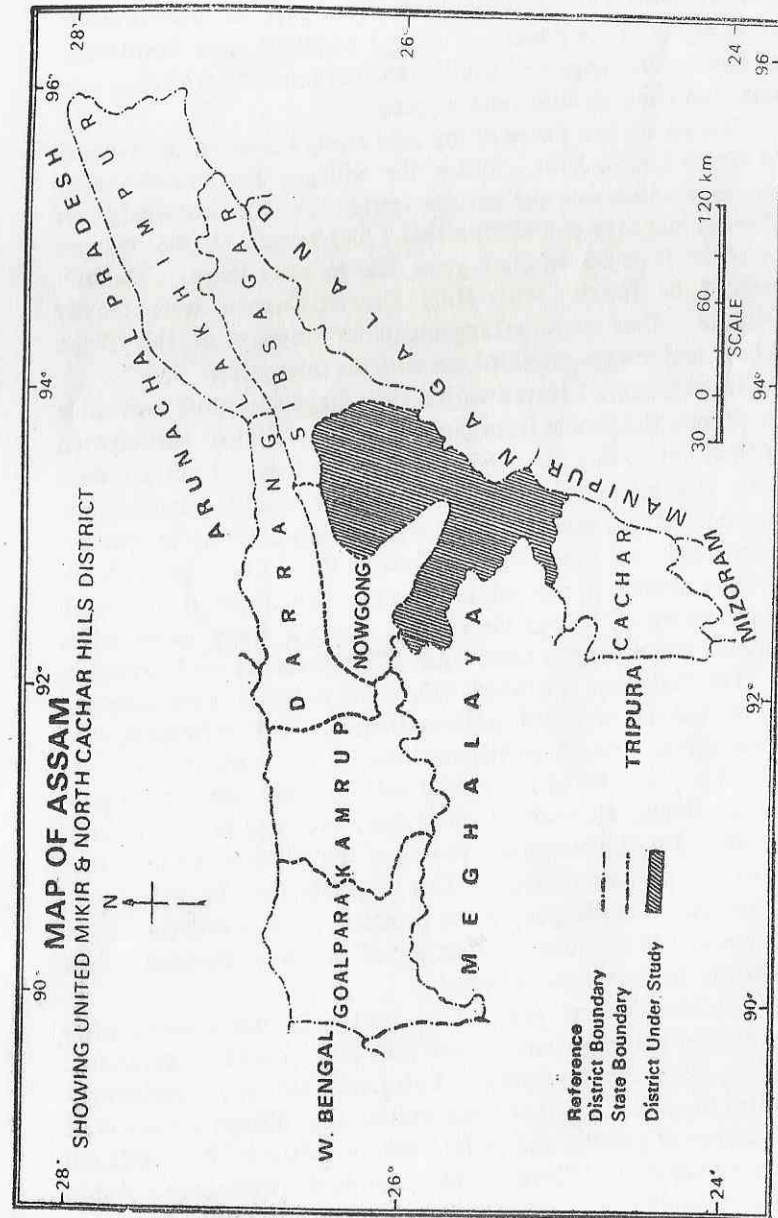
Factors like communication, contact situation, degree of isolation, and size of villages were taken into account while selecting the villages for study. Availability of accommodation facilities in the villages were also taken into consideration while selecting villages. Staying elsewhere, it was not easy to visit the villages everyday as they are generally situated at a distance of 8 to 20 kms away from the nearest semi-urban centres that had easy accommodation facilities. Location of villages in the midst of forests made it impossible to approach them easily. Another major difficulty was to get a house in a Dimasa village itself as they usually do not allow any stranger to get into their house whether vacant or otherwise. The Dimasa are extraordinarily suspicious.

The suspicion multiplied as I was a woman.

At first I stationed myself at Lumding town and visited the nearby Dimasa villages. In the vicinity, Lumding being the biggest town I lived there for some time in order to establish contact with the Dimasa and to find out a suitable accommodation in a Dimasa village. Lumding had a daily market which the Dimasa used to visit regularly and the first contact with them was established there.

The Dimasa men could speak broken Assamese, Bengali, and Hindi. As I had some knowledge of all the three languages, I could converse with them and that facilitated my work immensely. After a long and serious effort, I could gain some confidence of the people. Even then I purposely picked up an interpreter from Lumding market who had long commercial contacts with the people of Hajadisa, the largest Dimasa village in the Mikir Hills subdivision.

As it was obligatory, I had to seek permission of the Mikir Hills District Council to stay in a village of that area and that was available without much difficulty. Through the help of the interpreter and the Dimasa visitors of Lumding market I got a





shelter at Hajadisa and stayed there for four consecutive months and conducted field investigations there and in the adjacent villages. With the passing of time, I acquired some knowledge of Dimasa language and could also communicate with their women and children with relative ease.

During the last phase of my field study I lived in the villages of North Cachar Hills. There the villages had practically no communication with the outside world. So the knowledge of Dimasa language and culture that I had gained at the villages of Mikir Hills helped me a great deal to work there. The officials of the North Cachar Hills District Council were mostly Dimasa. They made arrangements for my stay at the village school and always provided me with an interpreter.

In each camp I stayed within the village and thus was able to observe the people from close quarters. I also participated in their day-to-day life. After some time they did not consider me a stranger any more and this helped my work considerably. Gradually I had access everywhere and was allowed to participate in different spheres of the Dimasa life. I was specially invited to attend all ceremonies, feasts, and festivals that took place during my stay in the village. Soon a stage came when nothing could happen there without my presence or knowledge.

The basic data on which this book is based were collected by the use of standard anthropological field techniques, viz., genealogical method, participant-observation method, etc. As I lived in the heart of the village itself, I could observe the people in almost all walks of their daily life and in their natural setting. I took preliminary census of the villages. In each case I covered the entire village. This job helped me to get myself acquainted with the people and establish contact with individual villagers. This initial contact paved the way through which most of the data were collected.

It is the Dimasa practice to gossip in late evening after meals and both men and women take part in such a gathering. Along with the interpreter, I also attended such gatherings, which provided excellent opportunities to discuss a point with a number of persons and to find out the relationship of different households in the village. Sometimes such discussions brought

out cases that were otherwise obscure or the village scandals that are usually kept secret.

To collect the data on different phases of life I took the help of participant-observation and case history methods. I interviewed the women of the villages who work as midwives. Thus I collected data on birth, pregnancy, prenatal and postnatal care, etc. In order to gather data on the activities of the children, adolescents, etc. I interviewed boys and always observed their behaviours from close quarter. Information on death ritual, etc., were collected through case history and participant-observation methods. Genealogical method was used to collect data on social organisation, particularly on clan, family, kinship, etc. In order to study kinship behaviour I mostly depended on observations and interviews. To supplement the data on social organisation, case histories of a number of marriages were recorded. Data on economic organisation was collected from each and every family of the village by administering a short questionnaire. Data on political organisation were gathered by interviewing the village officials and different officials of the district council. Details of the cases tried in the village councils were recorded from the council office. Cases that were tried in the district council court were noted from the original record. For the data on religious beliefs and practices and festivals I interviewed the priests of the villages. Besides, I always observed the religious collaborations and rituals which took place in the villages during my stay there. Data on festivals, etc., were further supplemented by participant-observation method and by interviewing the organisers of the festivals. Culture change was studied mainly by comparative method.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Dimasa constitute one of the Kachari tribes of Assam. The literal meaning of the word 'Dimasa' is river folk. *Di* means water, *sa* means son, that is, the people are the sons of water. In actual practice also they prefer to live by the side of rivers.

Linguistically, the Dimasa belong to the Boro group of Tibeto-Burman family. The exact place from where they migrated to the valley of Assam is yet a matter of speculation. No



available historical record gives details of their place of origin and route of migration. The other branches of Kachari tribes, i.e. the Boro Kachari and the Sonowal Kachari are concentrated in the Goalpara and Sibsagar district respectively of the State of Assam, India. The Dimasa are concentrated in the district of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. Each of these Kachari groups is culturally distinct. They have different dialects and are considered as separate tribes.

The Dimasa are still at a very low level of technological development, though they have a long tradition of glory and pride behind them which they very highly esteem. From the beginning of the thirteenth century, reference of the Dimasa are available in the history of Assam. Prior to the advent of the Ahom,<sup>1</sup> the Kachari kings ruled Assam valley for about 600 years with fame and achievements. Age-old traditional tales and anecdotes describe that the Kachari people thrust in through the slope of North Brahmaputra of middle Assam and established their homeland with their capital at Gauhati. After prolonged vendetta for about a century and a half, they were driven away by the Ahoms first to Dimapur and then to Maibong by 1500 A.D.

The Kachari Kings ruled the territory for sometime with the capital at Dimapur but the exact period of their sovereignty in their region could not be ascertained. The archaeological remains at Dimapur, however, bear ample evidence of their royal grandeur. Kachari names of the local rivers also prove the existence of their hegemony in this area.

The Kachari king, however, being defeated by the Ahom had to leave Dimapur with his people and establish a new capital at Maibong on the bank of the river Mahur in the North Cachar Hills. Here again, new royal buildings and temples were erected. In those days Maibong was surrounded by the Naga and Kuki tribes who accepted the supremacy of the Kachari king without any resistance. This propinquity with the other tribes, however, did not concoct the social and cultural life of the Kachari people.

They, however, could not stay there for long. A lethal assault from the king of Jyaintia forced the Kachari king Dharmadhvaj<sup>2</sup> to migrate to the plains of Cachar. Around

1750 A.D. the king shifted his capital from Maibong with his royal court and the subjects to Khaspur in plain Cachar. It is said that king Dharmadhvaj got occupation of Barak valley, where Khaspur is situated, from the king of Tripura. It was presented to him as dowry by his father-in-law. Khaspur, incidentally, was the last capital of the Kachari kings.

Although the capital was shifted to Khaspur, a large proportion of the Kachari population continued to live in the hill areas of the North Cachar. In order to govern them, the Kachari king appointed a Bara Bhandari (Chief Administrative Officer) and an army chief who were posted there.

During the Kachari regime at Khaspur the Bengalees of the adjacent areas accepted the sovereignty of the Kachari king and paid the revenue and tax imposed by him. This opened a new area of contact and social interaction to the Kachari.

From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards Hinduism ingratiated the Kacharis. Since the days at Maibong, Brahman priests had been gaining royal favour. Being influenced by them king Krishnachandra and his brother Govindachandra had developed a strong reverence to Hinduism. The Brahmins, in their turn, awarded recognition to them as the Kshatriya of Rajabansi tribe. In 1790, they embraced Hinduism. The conversion of the king did not, however, bring any major change in religious faith of the Kachari people of the locality. They continued to remain loyal to their own traditional faith.

Originally the principle deity of the Kachari king was Devi Ranachandi. After conversion of the king to Hinduism Devi Ranachandi lost some of her importance. Following the conversion, the king ordained an image coalescing Devi Kali<sup>3</sup> and Devi Ranachandi in the temple of Devi Ranachandi.

At the time of the Burmese invasion at the dawn of the nineteenth century the Kachari king Govindachandra following his defeat took shelter at Garbeta of Vikrampur, Sylhet. Then the British Government, however, reinstated Govindachandra in 1826 A.D. after subverting the Burmese and his sovereignty was reestablished. Within four years of his demise the British Government brought Cachar under their own authority and this was finally annexed by a proclamation on August 14, 1832.



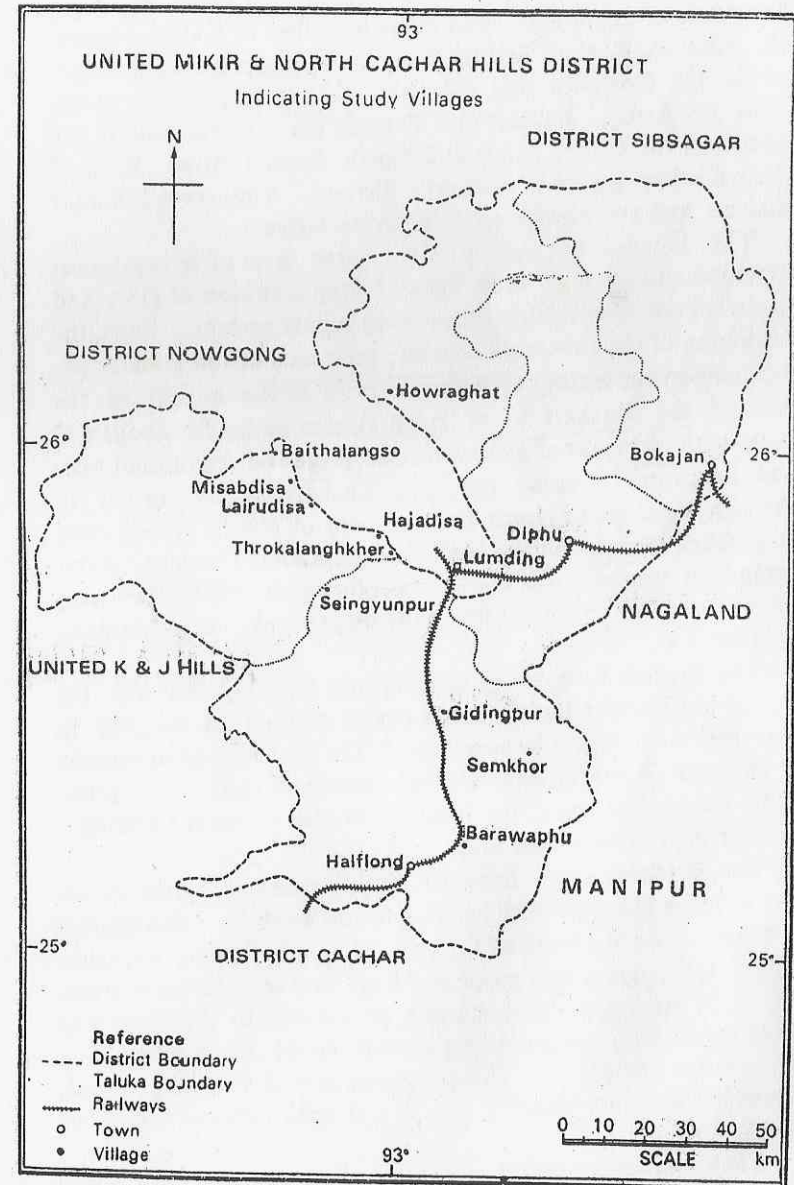
This action went unchallenged as the King Govindachandra had no successor for the Kachari throne. This eventually marked the end of the Kachari kingdom in plain Cachar.

The Kachari in the hilly region, however, enjoyed their preponderant influence till 1854. The hill Kachari (the Dimasa) in fact, had a somewhat different history. During the reign of Kshatri Chandra (alias Krishnachandra) one Tularam, an army chief, was appointed to govern North Cachar. Once Tularam invaded Assam valley and Nowgong with remarkable success. The king along with his successor—brother Govindachandra feared that Tularam being ambitious might revolt against the royal throne. Govindachandra, with a view to averting any such possibility, advised the king for insidious murder of Tularam. But the king reacted differently. He greeted the proposal with rebuttals and, instead, cautioned Tularam against Govindachandra's evil intention before he died. Accordingly, just after the death of the king, Tularam escaped to Sylhet. A little after he reappeared with a strong army and declared himself the king of the surrounding villages of North Cachar. In order to punish Tularam, Govindachandra sent Karma Singh, a successor to Tularam. There was a fierce battle between the two forces in the Jatinga valley. The exact result of the war is not known. A *status quo* was, however maintained and Tularam enjoyed supremacy in North Cachar until 1854 when he died.

After his death North Cachar was annexed with the district of Nowgong. In 1886 a certain portion was conceded to the Naga Hills and again between 1880 and 1881 another redemarcation was effected. At present North Cachar Hills unitedly with Mikir Hills constitute a separate district known as United Mikir and North Cachar Hills.

This, in brief, gives the outline of history of the Kachari. While referring to the almost oblivious past the Kachari people even today feel proud of past glory. They, however, at present constitute a Scheduled Tribe<sup>1</sup> distributed in the district of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and in the plains of Cachar district.

Until 1961, the Dimasa had been treated as a sub-tribe of the Kachari tribes. In the 1961 Census, they were classified





as a separate tribe. At present the total population of the Dimasa of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills is 210,705, the males and females being 110,313 and 110,392 respectively (Census of India, 1961).

#### SETTING

The United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district came into existence on 17 November 1951. Before that, the district formed parts of Nowgong, Sibsagar, United Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Cachar districts. The district covers an area of 5,383 square miles or 15,237.0 square kilometres and lies between latitudes 24° 54' and 26° 41' N and longitudes 92° 8' and 93° 53' E approximately. This newly constituted district is bounded on the north by the district of Nowgong and Sibsagar; on the east by Sibsagar, Nagaland and Manipur; on the south by Cachar district and on the west by the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills district and comprises two subdivisions; viz. Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills. There are four police stations under the former subdivision, viz. Baithalangso, Howraghat, Bokajan and Diphu and the Haflong police station under the latter. Diphu is the district headquarter and Haflong is a subdivisional headquarter.

There are two Autonomous Councils,<sup>5</sup> in the district. They are known as the Mikir Hills District Council and North Cachar Hills District Council with headquarters at Diphu and Haflong respectively.

The area under survey comprises low undulating hills. The whole surrounding is studded with many small hills and rills. The hillslopes in this vicinity have in most cases gentle inclination. This facilitates slash and burn type of cultivation locally known as *jhum*. The altitude of the area varies from 759' to 1600'. The undulated terrain dotted with hills has got a few flat narrow valleys which are suitable for wet cultivation. The general appearance of the hills is picturesque and the sides of the lower hills are clothed with luxurious forests.

The climatic data of Lumding and Haflong will fit the areas under survey as the villages studied are situated near Lumding and Haflong. The annual mean of maximum temperature of Lumding is 29.15 degrees centigrade while the minimum mean

temperature is 18.11 degrees centigrade. At Haflong annual mean of maximum temperature is 36.4 degrees centigrade and the mean of minimum temperature is 8.8 degrees centigrade. The highest temperature is recorded in July and the lowest is recorded in January. The percentage of humidity is quite high and this condition prevails throughout the year. Only in winter the percentage of humidity goes down. Although the mean total of annual rainfall of Lumding is 1302.25 mm it seems unusually low for a place situated in Assam. It appears that the place belongs to a comparatively dry pocket covering parts of Nowgong and the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. At Haflong the annual rainfall is 2525.97 mm.

Compared to other parts of India, the monsoon sets relatively early in this area. Intensive rainfall is fairly distributed over five months from May to September. December is the driest month of the year and the maximum rainfall is recorded in the month of July. The altitude is moderate in this area and weather is never very sultry or ghastly. Its situation outside the tropic and the altitude make the climate rather pleasant and sub-tropical.

The area is hilly with rare rock exposure. Hill slopes have thick soil cover with dense forest growth. The area under survey is included in the category of "unclassed state forest" of Assam.

"The forest reserves of the district are potentially very rich as they sustain very valuable forest produce of trees, canes and bamboos and many other minor forest products such as *Patidoi Agar*, *Dhuna*, *Chalmugra*, etc., which give a very high revenue to the district... The forest is chiefly of miscellaneous type with wet and dry portions."<sup>6</sup>

The natural vegetation of the area belongs to "tropical wet hill *sal* forest" grouped as the deciduous *shorea-dillenia* largerstroemia formation. In the unclassed state forest the following varieties of trees are largely found: sonaru (*Cassia fistula*) ajhar (*Largerstroemia reginor*), titasapa (*Michelia champaca*), gumserai (*Cinnamomum glanduliferum*) and gornari (*Gmelina arborea*). These are mainly used for constructional purposes. In addition to above, trees, bushes of reeds, creepers, and



various qualities of ferns are the other natural vegetation. Khari (*Sachharam fuscum*) reeds, Ulu (*Imperata aruundinacea*) wild basilis are few other important shrubs that have bearing upon the shifting cultivation.

#### THE VILLAGES AND THEIR PEOPLE

The Dimasa villages are situated in the interior forest surrounded by hills. However, it is almost axiomatic that there must be a river flowing nearby, which proves the myth that the Dimasa people love rivers.

All the villages are homogeneous, i.e. inhabited by the Dimasa people only. It is commonly observed that their villages are located in a particular tract where their concentration is more. The villages have specific name or often they are named after the river flowing nearest to the settlement. Sometimes it is named after the clan name of the original settler. The intensively studied villages are Barawaphu, Hajadisa, Seingyunpur and Throkalahkher.

As their economy is based on shifting cultivation, the size of the villages is not very big. Whenever a settlement cannot accommodate the growing population, they migrate to establish a new settlement. However, they move around the Dimasa land about which they are traditionally aware. The four villages together have a total population of 455, having 230 males and 225 females. Distribution of population of the villages is given in the following tables.

TABLE 1

*Distribution of Population*

Name of Villages	Number of households	Male	Female	Total
Barawaphu	37	98	107	205
Hajadisa	30	57	53	110
Seingyunpur	9	23	11	34
Throkalahkher	25	52	54	106
Total	101	230	225	455

The distribution of population of the four villages has been given in Table 1. Table 2 describes the distribution of population according to age group and sex.

TABLE 2

*Distribution of Population According to Age-group and Sex*

Age-group	Name of villages									
	Barawaphu		Hajadisa		Seingyunpur		Throka-langhker		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0-5	19	23	11	10	7	3	15	9	52	45
6-15	27	36	12	10	5	0	16	13	60	59
16-55	46	44	32	31	11	8	19	31	108	114
56+	6	4	2	2	0	0	2	1	10	7
Total	98	107	57	53	23	11	52	54	230	225

In all the villages except Seingyunpur we find a more or less balanced sex ratio of population. In Seingyunpur the ratio of male and female is 23:11. The people of this village migrated to the present site only in 1963 and actually a selected portion of the total population of the original village migrated. That is why we find a wide discrepancy in the sex ratio of the population. So far as the distribution of population in different age-group is concerned, we find more or less an identical picture. Except in Seingyunpur all other villages have normal distribution of population. At Seingyunpur the lack of population in the age-group of 56 and above and the absence of female in the age-group of 6-15 can also be attributed to the cause of their recent migration. However, the ratio of population between age-group 16-55 and others (0-5, 6-15, and 56+) is balanced in all the four villages separately and when added together.

Table 3 describes marital condition of population of four villages.



TABLE 3

## Marital Condition

Name of villages	Married		Widowed		Divorced		Unmarried		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Barawaphu	30	30	4	8	1	1	63	68	98	107
Hajadisa	17	17	6	6	2	0	32	30	57	53
Seingyunpur	8	8	0	0	0	0	15	3	23	11
Throkalan- ghkher	13	13	3	7	0	0	36	34	52	54
Total	68	68	13	21	3	1	146	135	130	225

In Barawaphu 28.98% of the population is married. In Hajadisa the number of married people form 1/3 of the total population, i.e. 33.3%. In Seingyunpur the married people form almost a half of the total population, i.e. 47.05%. In comparison to these villages Throkalan-ghkher has got lesser number of married people. There the married people form only 24.52% of the total population.

At Barawaphu and Throkalan-ghkher the number of widows exceeds the number of widowers. There is no widowed man or woman at Seingyunpur and the number of widows is the same at Hajadisa. As Seingyunpur is a new settlement, only the young married couple and their children migrated here. So they have no widows or widowers among them. Among the Dimasa remarriage of widowed persons and divorces are common. That is why the number of widowed or divorced men and women is very meagre in all the villages.

Tables 4 and 5 show the distribution of *sengfong* (patriclan) and *jaddi* (matriclan) respectively of the four villages. It is worthwhile to mention here that the Dimasa have both patriclan and matriclan. The male folk are primarily affiliated to the patriclan and the female folk are primarily affiliated to the matriclan.

There are altogether 16 patriclans in the four villages and

23 matriclans. Different clans have maximum concentration in different villages, e.g. Daulagopo patriclan has maximum concentration at Hajadisa and Throkalan-ghkher. Naidingsa patriclan has its maximum concentration at Barawaphu and village Seingyunpur is largely populated by the members of Seingyun patriclan. In the case of matriclan also Gachauma has the maximum concentration at Barawaphu. Thaliju forms the largest group at Hajadisa and at Seingyunpur Madaima matriclan has a largest number of population. At Throkalan-ghkher the major matriclan is Longmaisajilu.

TABLE 4

## Distribution of Patriclan in Four Villages

S. No.	Name of Patriclan	Barawaphu	Hajadisa	Seingyunpur	Throkalan- ghkher
1.	Adao	—	5	—	7
2.	Batari	7	—	—	—
3.	Bodosa	9	—	—	—
4.	Daudunglangtha	—	11	—	—
5.	Daulagopo	—	38	—	21
6.	Hagjer	3	—	—	—
7.	Haphila	9	—	—	—
8.	Hasnusa	1	—	—	—
9.	Jibragede	4	—	—	—
10.	Khempraisa	11	3	10	17
11.	Langthasa	24	—	—	6
12.	Londisa	1	—	—	—
13.	Longmailaisa	4	—	—	—
14.	Nabingsa	—	—	1	—
15.	Naidingsa	25	—	—	—
16.	Seingyun	—	—	12	—



TABLE 5

*Distribution of Matrilineal in Four Villages*

S. No.	Name of Matrilineal	Barawaphu	Hajadisa	Seingyunpur	Throkalingkher
1.	Againaju	—	4	—	6
2.	Bairingsa	8	—	—	—
3.	Banglaima Gedeba	5	—	—	—
4.	Buguma	7	—	—	—
5.	Disru	—	—	1	—
6.	Gachauma	16	—	3	—
7.	Hachaidima	1	—	—	—
8.	Kharangdi	—	4	—	—
9.	Lalangji	—	2	—	—
10.	Langmaisajilu	—	2	26	—
11.	Madaima	15	—	4	—
12.	Mairangma	—	—	3	—
13.	Mairangma Dauga	9	—	—	—
14.	Miungma Dauga	6	—	—	—
15.	Paithanju	—	2	—	—
16.	Pakhaju	—	10	—	—
17.	Rajama	12	—	—	—
18.	Saidima	7	—	—	—
19.	Saidima Dauga	6	—	—	—
20.	Saikhudijilek	13	—	—	—
21.	Thaliju	1	15	—	9
22.	Tharaju	—	14	—	14
23.	Yamthaidirao	2	—	—	—

TABLE 6

*Number of Births in Four Villages*

Year	Barawaphu		Hajadisa		Seingyunpur		Throkalingkher		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1960	5	4	3	1	2	0	3	2	13	7
1961	4	3	3	2	1	0	3	4	10	9
1962	2	4	2	3	2	1	4	2	10	10
1963	3	6	2	0	0	1	2	0	7	7
1964	2	1	1	5	2	0	2	1	7	7
1965	3	6	0	0	1	1	1	4	5	11
Total	19	24	10	11	8	3	15	13	52	51

Table 6 gives the distribution of number of births in the villages during the period between 1960 and 1965, by year and sex. When the total number of births during the six-year period is taken into consideration, we find that Seingyunpur has proportionately the largest number of babies born. There are eight couples of childbearing age there, and eleven babies were born of them in six years. Though the couples belong to the age-group of 16-55, in fact all of them are closer to the lower range of age-group (Between 25 and 40 years of age). So their having the largest number of babies is natural. One of the queer features of these eleven babies is their abnormal distribution by sex.

The next highest number of babies were born at Throkalingkher. Proportionately, the smallest number of babies were born at Hajadisa and one of the striking features of this village is that not a single baby was born there in the year 1965. Demographically this is, rather, an unusual feature. There was no occurrence of death at Hajadisa during that year either.



TABLE 7  
Incidences of Death in the Dimasa Villages

	0-5		6-15		16-55		55+		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Barawaphu</b>										
1960	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1961	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
1962	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	3
1963	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
1964	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
1965	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
<b>Hajadisa</b>										
1960	—	—	1	—	3	—	—	—	4	—
1961	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	—
1962	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	4
1963	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	2
1964	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1965	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Seingyunpur</b>										
1960	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1961	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1962	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1963	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1964	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
1965	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Throkalangkher</b>										
1960	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	1
1961	1	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	3	1
1962	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	1	1
1963	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	1	2	2
1964	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
1965	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
	3	3	1	4	11	5	2	3	17	15

Table 7 describes the incidences of death in all the four villages during the year 1960 and 1965. From the Table it appears that the mortality rate among the Dimasa is moderate. The largest number of deaths has been recorded in the age-group of 16-55. This age-group has also the largest number of population.

## NOTES

1. Originally a tribal group who invaded Assam valley from the Shan state of Burma. Now they are treated as the Kshatriya caste of Assam.
2. Some authors are of the opinion that King Kartick Chandra, a successor of King Dharmadhvaj, being defeated by the king of Jayantia had to migrate to the plains of Cachar.
3. An incarnation of goddess Shakti, a supreme deity of the Hindu pantheon.
4. They are remnants of aboriginal tribes not wholly assimilated into the mainstream of Indian population. They are listed in a special schedule issued by the Government of India and thereby entitled to special government protection and other constitutional benefits.
5. With the Government policy aiming at, on the one hand, realisation of economic and social advancement of the hill areas within the framework of a common development and welfare programme for the entire State and, on the other hand, the provision of opportunities to the tribal people for their development in their own way consistent with their distinctive environment, age-old customs and social and administrative traditions, the State Government constituted the Autonomous District Councils under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. By the end of 1952, District Councils were set up in all the Autonomous Hills Districts of the State. The United Mikir and North Cachar Hill having two separate and independent District Councils known as the Mikir Hills District Council and North Cachar Hill District Council respectively... The Autonomous Hill Districts are administered according to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the constitution. Each Autonomous District has a District Council of not more than 24 members of whom not less than three-fourths are elected on the basis of adult franchise. The District Councils are empowered to make their own rules for the Constitution of the District Councils, holding of elections, transacti on



of business, etc. They have executive and legislative powers....”  
(Pakyntein 1965:7)

6. The United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district contains approximately 64,353 acres of reserve forest, “In addition to the area under Reserve Forest, the tract bears an extensive area of unclassed state forest. The latter area is forests in name only due to the fact that unrestricted jhumming has virtually eaten up all forest trees.”  
(Pakyntein, 1965:20)

# I

## Phases of Life

### THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

The Dimasa believe that the offsprings are the blessings of God. They have some knowledge of biological paternity<sup>1</sup> and recognise the definite role of father in procreation. They are aware that sexual union is necessary for impregnation, but their knowledge about role of sperm and egg is not clear. They call them male and female seeds.

The Dimasa commonly consider equity of responsibility of both the parents in the matter of begetting a child. They compare a woman with the earth. As the seeds sown on the earth germinate as plants likewise seeds of male when sown in a female body take shape of a new baby. This simile is in agreement with Manu, the ancient Hindu Law-enunciator.<sup>2</sup>

The Dimasa have their own ‘rhythm’ theory of birth. According to them copulation between the third and the seventh day after menstruation in case of young girls and between the third and fourteenth day in case of elderly women leads to pregnancy. They believe that young girls can conceive even before experiencing external menstruation. Children born of such cases are supposed to die of thunder-bolt.<sup>3</sup> The Dimasa know that women loose fertility with menopause in the advanced age.

Ordinarily, cessation of menstruation declares pregnancy. A pregnant woman is not deterred from her normal life. She takes care of the regular routine duty until her confinement. In the advanced stage, however, she does not move outside the village. Nor does she go to the forest or visit a cremation



ground lest evil spirits harm the child in the womb. She is not allowed to attend any funeral either. Fish without scale and meat of tortoise are strictly prohibited to a pregnant woman. Even dreaming of these objects is considered as bad omen.

The husband of a pregnant woman performs the worship of Naisodi-nusodi<sup>4</sup> by sacrificing a hen. It is believed that this can make the child birth safe and easy. Delivery of a baby always takes place inside the living quarters. In the Dimasa language birth of a baby is called *hagusujaba*. *Ha* means earth and *gusujaba* means polluted, that is, where a birth takes place the earth gets polluted.

*Hojajik*, the midwife helps a woman in labour. A midwife is helped by a *sengjaodi* or an assistant midwife in her work. Where an assistant midwife is not recruited, an *anuma* or surrogate mother helps the midwife. Any mother of a suckling baby can become a surrogate mother. It is the Dimasa custom that mothers of male and female children can become *anuma* of female and male children respectively. This suggests a probable marriageability between a person and the child of his or her *anuma*, though otherwise an *anuma* is treated like a mother. In actual practice also a Dimasa can marry the son or daughter of her or his *anuma*, provided there is no incest relationship between them. The first breast milk is offered to a new born baby by his or her surrogate mother. If no woman is available to be a surrogate mother of the new born baby the midwife does all the work by herself. She also offers the first breast milk to the baby provided of course she has breast milk at that time.

When a child is born, the attending midwife offers worship in the nearby river.<sup>5</sup> She also buries the placenta under the eaves of the house. It is buried in the right side if the child is a male one and if the child is a female the placenta is buried in the left side. It is the Dimasa custom to keep an axe under the bed of a new born baby. It is believed that this will protect the baby against *bangla* fever.<sup>6</sup>

At Semkhor, a village of the North Cachar Hills, further sex-linked customs were observed. There the umbilical chord of a male child was cut by putting it on the handle of an axe and that of a female child was cut by putting it on *thuri* (a part

of a loom). In no other Dimasa village this custom was found to be observed.

The period of seclusion for the mother varies from two weeks to a month depending on the period it takes for the umbilical chord to get dry and fall. During this period the mother cannot cook and fetch water for others. Nobody is allowed to touch her. All except the little children who touch her have to take a purificatory bath. During seclusion of a woman usually her mother, if she lives nearby, or in her absence her mother-in-law or any female relative does household duties on her behalf and also takes care of her. She needs care usually only for a day or two. After that the woman gets recovered and then onwards does her own cooking.

When a child is born the father of the child cannot go out of the village for three days. The village as a whole also observes a period of pollution. No *gerba*<sup>7</sup> (village worship) can take place there as long as the period of pollution continues. When the village is too big, (there are not many big villages of the Dimasa) the entire village does not observe the period of pollution. In such a case only the clan members observe the pollution.

On the day when the umbilical chord of the baby falls both the mother and the father have a purificatory bath and the house and the household goods are cleaned. On the same day the father shaves the head of the new born baby. In absence of the father, any senior male member of the patriclan can serve the purpose. The mother or any other woman cannot do the shaving, particularly when the child is a boy. In case they do, the boy will not be allowed to worship the Dimasa gods. Though the female child is mostly shaved by her mother, the father can also do the shaving. This ceremonial shaving is compulsory among the Dimasa and is known as *Khanaigusugarba*.

Generally *daosathaiba* (a special ceremony for bringing the new born baby outside the house for the first time) is observed on the next day. Sometimes the date of this ceremony is fixed on some other day also according to the convenience of parents of the new born baby. This special ceremony is called *nanadihangba*. The midwife brings the baby outside the house and



shows him to the people who have been invited for the occasion. The invitees shower blessings on the baby. Before the baby is ceremonially brought outside the house, special care is taken to scare and keep away the evil spirits. The maternal uncle spits on the face of the baby after chewing sesame seeds. In absence of the maternal uncle any male member of the mother's patriclan can perform this duty.

On the day of *nanadihangba*, i.e. bringing the baby outside, (it was observed at Semkhor) the father of the baby sacrificed a cock and a hen on the spot where the placenta was buried. These sacrificial animals were given to the midwife and the surrogate mother. But this was not observed in any other Dimasa village either of Mikir Hills or of North Cachar Hills. Then the surrogate mother, facing eastward, plasters the front space of the door with earth and spreads a banana leaf there. The midwife then keeps the baby on that leaf and lifts him three times. After that she sprinkles water on the right and mustard oil on the left carrying the baby on her lap. Then again facing eastward she counts from one to ten carrying an axe in her hand. The Dimasa could not explain the significance of this ritual. But according to them, the axe is carried in order to keep the influence of evil spirits away. The midwife again repeats the counting turning once to the right and then to the left. Afterwards the midwife and the assistant midwife or the surrogate mother request the father of the baby to accept him. They say, "We have brought gold and silver. Who is the father and who will take them?" Then the father takes the baby wrapping him with a new piece of cloth. All the invitees then bless the baby with a long and prosperous life. The mother's brother if his parents are alive blesses the child in a special way. He chews some rice and sesame seeds and spits on the face of the baby. The sesame seeds, it is believed, will give him long life and the rice will bring prosperity to him. In the absence of the mother's brother any man of the mother's patriclan whose parents are alive can perform this ceremony.

The midwife then is supplied with rice beer by the father of the baby with which she then washes the hands of the baby. After that she puts a little cooked rice and a drop of rice beer into the mouth of the baby. In the case of a male child only

puffed rice (*akhi*) is put into his mouth. It is believed that this enables the baby to learn to speak quickly. When the ceremony is over, the invitees are entertained with rice beer. Those who can afford, also supply food to the invitees.

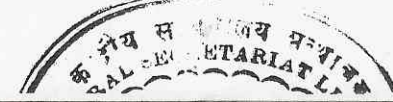
In Dimasa villages other than Semkhor these ceremonies are observed in an abbreviated form. There the midwife simply brings out the baby and seeks blessings for him. In the case of special blessings by the mother's brother, no strictness is observed whether his parents are alive or dead. No cock or hen is sacrificed there either. And though the chewing of sesame seeds and ceremonial spitting on the face of the baby is done this act is interpreted differently. There the spitting does not stand for blessing, as it is in the case of Semkhor. Spitting is done rather, in order to protect the baby from the eyes of the evil spirits.

The midwife and other attendants including assistant midwife or the surrogate mother are entertained with food and drink and supplied with cloth for their services rendered at the time of child birth. They are usually treated on the first rice eating ceremony of the baby. If someone cannot afford to have a separate ceremony for first rice eating he pays the dues of the attendants on the day of *nanadihangba*. Sometimes they are paid in cash also.

The first rice eating ceremony is observed sometimes between the sixth and twelfth month of the baby. This ceremony, in Dimasa language is known as *bisingjiriba*. The first rice is given to the baby by the midwife. At that time the name of the baby is also selected. The name is usually chosen by the parents. Any suggestions from others are also considered.

#### INFANCY

The baby is kept tied on the mother's back almost throughout the day. The mother does not seem to have any difficulty in her work with the back-load of the baby. Everywhere, whether in the field, or river, or market, mothers are found carrying their babies in the same fashion. The babies are placed on the back in such a way that they can suckle the mother's breast conveniently and without causing any difficulty to their mothers. At times of unavoidable circumstances the baby is transferred to his father's back for a short while. Thus it is found among the





Dimasa that one's very early childhood is centred around the parents only.

When the baby grows a little the mother helps him to walk and makes him habituated to solid food. Till the age of four the baby remains entirely dependent on his parents. At that age children learn where to defecate and how to clean themselves without taking any help from their parents. This is for the first time that they start becoming independent. In the villages there are no latrines as such for excretion. The nearby forests of the villagers are used for this purpose.

From the very infancy children accompany their parents everywhere and nothing is purposely kept hidden from them. Thus by actual participation a child begins to learn the sanctions and taboos of their community life. The Dimasa way of learning is rather an active and practical process. Gradually the child becomes familiar with the natural and social environment in which he is born.

Children enter into the world of their own from the fifth year. They form a group of their own age-mates. Up to the age of ten they don't have to share any burden of the family. They simply move around the village. Sometimes they collect edible fruits and tubers. Occasionally, they catch fish in shallow streams and enjoy the delicacy of uncooked prawn. Venture for the swarm of butterfly is also a favourite pastime for them. Sometimes they are found to shoot birds with catapults. Parents seem to be indulgently liberal to them at this stage. They neither invite them to work nor bestow any formal teaching. They discuss, even otherwise, confidential matters in presence of their children without any prejudice.

The young boys spend their day in participating in games and sports. The following are the favourite games of the Dimasa children :

#### *Watab kaba*

This is a game of both boys and girls. They participate in it while having their bath. The children of tender age make a huge sound in the river water by pushing water from the opposite directions. It is a favourite game, specially for the unmarried young girls.

#### *Hatai kaba*

This is a game of small earthen balls. Only the boys of tender age take part in this game.

#### *Roman nilaiba*

This is a test of strength. Boys of tender age usually participate in this game. But at the time of *busu* (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 5) or a marriage ceremony the youth and the grown up members also participate in this game. Two persons hold the opposite ends of a piece of bamboo and simply push each other by their shoulders. Sometimes they do not use any bamboo and simply push each other by their shoulders.

#### *Balibathang*

It is a sport for the boys. Usually equal number of boys stand on either side of a demarcation line on the ground. Then by holding his breath and making a sound with indistinct melodious pronunciation of *balibathang-thing*, one of the members of a party crosses the demarcation line and tries to touch a member of another party and then comes back. If he can come back successfully after touching a member of the opposite party in a single breath, that particular member of the party is eliminated. Then one member of the other party does the same. This process is repeated until all the members of one side are eliminated. The remaining party is declared the winner.

#### *Phangsi phangsi jaba*

It is a game of the boys. They count fingers accompanying a musical note as follows :

'phangsi phangsi phangsi si  
phangi narao jarina  
taidimama madungkho  
Yahu yahu nava diphung  
Lailai dumai maing maise  
dukri yasifli

This musical note does not bear any meaning. These are simply a chain of sounds that are uttered while counting the fingers.



*Panthao malao khawala*

This is a game of the boys of tender age. A group of boys take part in this game. One of them impersonates a jackfruit tree, another is the owner of the tree, another is a thief and the rest are jackfruits. The 'jackfruits' hang from the tree and the owner of the tree guards them against the thief. The thief comes unnoticed and examines them as to whether the fruits are ready for consumption. Sometimes he steals fruits successfully and sometimes is caught by the owner and beaten. This is repeated until all the fruits are stolen away.

The life of young girls is marked different from that of the boys of the same age-group. The girls prefer to move around their mother all the time and like to imitate them in every domestic work. It is very often noticed that girls of about eight years are accompanying their mothers to the market with small loads on their back. Young girls also fetch drinking water and small bundles of firewood occasionally. In Throkalongkher village a girl of six years was discovered working with her miniature loom made by her mother. The girl, of course, was still an apprentice. Thus the girls begin formal training at a comparatively tender age while the boys run a restless life up to their adolescence.

## ADOLESCENCE AND NODRANG

Adolescence is an important phase of Dimasa life. This is the time when the youth plan and get themselves prepared for their future. During adolescence the youngsters begin to think independently. In most of the villages, like Barawaphu, Gidingpur and Semkhor it has been observed that boys of 13 to 14 years take their abode in *nodrang*, i.e. bachelor's dormitory. No formal initiation is required to be observed for entering into the dormitory and there is no hard and fast rule that one must have to attend a bachelor's dormitory.

The Dimasa boys are ordinarily dutiful. They work in their father's agricultural field and are always loyal to their parents. In the evening the young boys throng in the dormitory and gossip. At times in the evening arrangements are made for music and dance in which girls also participate. The elderly persons too can join the entertainment though they ordinarily do not

participate in any other activity of the dormitory life. In the villages like Hajadisa and Throkalongkher where there is no bachelor's dormitory boys usually sit around the fire in open courtyards under the trees and keep the fire alive till midnight. Sometimes they go to the neighbouring villages, where there are bachelor's dormitory, for gossip. Young members of the dormitory are supposed to carry out any orders of the members who are senior to them in age.

In Dimasa life, the dormitory functions as a youth organisation, particularly at the time of *busu*—the annual harvest festival. Besides this, the youth organisation collectively respond to the call of the headman in rendering any social service, e.g. tilling the land of an invalid, roofing the house of a widow. The organisational integrity of this institution is best felt and appreciably executed at the time of the annual harvest festival. Young girls they do not share the dormitory life, form the 'second line of defence' in the organisation. Reputed and efficient young boys and girls are nominated *nagahoja* and *malahoja*, i.e. the joint president of the executive committee of the annual harvest festival. They, again select their assistants according to their choice. The joint presidents and their assistants together conduct the festival. Elders happily greet the leadership of the youth. The young boys and girls arrange everything that is necessary. For instance they collect contribution from the villagers, purchase meat, and carry out all the necessary formalities of the festival. Thus in an informal way they gain formal training and experience and familiarise themselves with the norms of the society. Of course, only those of 16 to 20 years of age are selected for the responsible offices and occasionally they find out their life's companion from this close association.

Boys and girls enjoy equal freedom in this regard. As they cannot live with their parents after marriage, many a youth makes his own house and finds out agricultural lands by cutting and clearing jungles. Thus from their dormitory life the Dimasa youth start chalking out plans for their future.

## ✓ ADULTHOOD AND MARRIAGE

(The primary occupation of a Dimasa youth is to find out



a suitable mate and of getting married. As sharing of economic responsibilities is one of the main objectives of Dimasa marriage, child marriage is not in vogue among them. Until attaining adulthood and being sufficiently capable of taking economic responsibility, one does not dare marry.)

(Marriage is, however, a major breakthrough in one's life. With marriage a man leaves his parental house and sets up a new family of his own.) (He comes to be regarded as the head of a family and enjoys the rights and obligations offered by the society. His opinions and ideas regarding community life are also given serious consideration.) Thus every new wedlock adds a new identifiable unit to the society. A man in the Dimasa society does not achieve full status until he gets married. It is the general belief of the people that if a man dies unmarried he loses his chance of rebirth.<sup>8</sup>)

As stated earlier child marriage is not possible in the Dimasa society as a newly-wedded couple is supposed to live in their own house after one year of marriage. Usually the Dimasa youth joins the regular labour force at the age of fourteen. When he is about 15 years old he is accepted as a full working member of the society. But he is not supposed to be eligible for marriage till twenty years of his age as it takes a reasonable amount of time before one can get settled in life. The usual marriageable age, as is observed, ranges from 21 to 28 in case of male and 15 to 20 in case of females. The husband is expected to be elder than the wife, but in few cases the wife is found senior to her husband in age. However, this factor of seniority or juniority of the partners does not stand in the way of marriage nor invites any ridiculous remarks from the members of the society.

In the selection of spouses the physical beauty is not a major consideration, particularly in case of boys. Sound health and hardworking nature, intelligence and efficiency are taken as requisite qualification in respect of either of the partners. A well-known Dimasa proverb says :

'Saing gisimdungba saing gini  
saing gisim majanbga saing gini.'

It means, "They say, the beauty of one woman of dark complexion is greater than that of two women of fair complexion as one cloudy day is hotter than two sunny days." By this the Dimasa mean that efficiency is preferable to physical beauty. However, at the time of selection of a bride feminine beauty is also taken into consideration.

Premarital sex relations is not encouraged though it is tolerated by the Dimasa society. In the Mikir Hills subdivision, the youngmen enjoy premarital and extra marital sex relations more often than in the North Cachar Hills subdivision. In the Mikir Hills even the elderly persons have extra-marital sex relations. The youngmen, however, indulge in it more in order to minimise the amount of bride-price. When a girl conceives before her marriage the village council imposes a fine on the boy who is considered the offender and compels him to marry the girl by paying a nominal bride-price to the father of the girl. Society considers the matter of premarital and extra-marital sex relationship from a humanitarian point of view. According to Dimasa custom, the male and female children born of such union should be given to the father and mother of the children respectively. But in actual practice children of either of the sexes generally live with their mother.

The Dimasa in the North Cachar Hills are comparatively more conservative in this respect than the Dimasa of Mikir Hills. In the North Cachar Hills marriages are mostly settled by negotiation. Contrarily, in the villages of Mikir Hills the boys and girls prefer to handle the matter themselves. Naturally the parents are also liberal there in this respect. However, in case of marriage by negotiation both in Mikir Hills, and North Cachar Hills final approval of the boy and the girl is sought by their respective parents. This suggests that the Dimasa youth enjoy a degree of freedom as far as their marriage negotiations are concerned. An utmost strictness is, however, observed and the parents show opposition if a boy or a girl intends to marry outside their community. In such cases, both in Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills even an offer of an enormous amount of bride-price cannot alter their decision. In one case a girl in village Gidingpur who read upto class VIII in the district town Haflong and became involved with a



non-tribal Assamese youngman. No sooner had this news come to her father's knowledge, she was brought back to the village and married to an educated Dimasa youngman. Not a single case of marriage outside the community has ever been reported from North Cachar Hills. In Mikir Hills, however, two girls married outside their community. Taomaidi, sister of Rangsendao of village Hajadisa married a Bengalee youngman of Lumding town. Daughter of Raifal of village Sujiling of Mikir Hills married a Nepali youngman of an adjacent village. Both the girls were excommunicated after marriage and they were never accepted in the Dimasa fold again. The girl who married the Bengalee youngman had to sever all connections with her people for good. The girl who married the Nepali youngman, however, still maintains a sort of relationship with her parental family notwithstanding the act of excommunication as she was the only daughter and a favourite of her father. Though she is invited by her father on ceremonial occasions, she is never allowed to enter into his house.

#### *Rituals of Marriage*

At the initial stage of a negotiated marriage the boy's party first approaches the girls's father or in his absence her guardian with one *seer* (a measure weighing approximately one kilogram) of salt. This is known as *sandidangsingba*. If he accepts that salt, it indicates that he is inclined to establish the matrimonial relationship with the party. Otherwise, he politely refuses to accept the same.

The next function is *laothailangba*. At this the boy's father or guardian goes to the girls's house with four *laothai* (containers made of small bottle gourd) full of rice beer and presents them to the girl's father or guardian. This formal visit is repeated three times and different discussions are carried through in order to complete the negotiation. Thus the amount of bride-price is also settled and arrangements for wedding are finalised.

The Dimasa believe that the marriage should take place within a month after *laothailangba*, otherwise the married life of the would-be couple might not be a happy one. Marriage,

usually, is solemnised after the harvest. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday are considered to be specially auspicious days for matrimonial purposes.

On the day preceding marriage an advance party from the bridegroom's side goes to the girl's house. They make necessary arrangements for their stay over there. At night the young boys of both the villages stage a mock fight.

The following morning the bridegroom accompanied by his father and other relatives comes to the bride's house. Before starting for the bride's place, her would be father-in-law performs *mayofgarba*<sup>9</sup> in presence of the village elders. This is done in order to secure a safe journey to the bride's house.

The bridegroom is ceremonially dressed in fine cloth and wrapper. His head is noticeably groomed with oil. The other members of the bridegroom's party are dressed in clean cloth. The father of the bridegroom is specially dressed with head-gear and other wrappers. Then they start for the bride's village.

Before entering the bride's village a special ceremony, *lama-fungba*<sup>10</sup> ('*lama*' means road and '*fungba*' means to close) is performed by the father of the bridegroom by chopping an egg. It is believed that this will stop evil spirits from entering into the village. The next function is *midogarba*<sup>11</sup>. In this ceremony a pig is sacrificed in honour of the gods. It is believed that this secures a prosperous life for the newly married couple. The sacrifice is done on behalf of the father of the bridegroom. He carries the pig on his way to the bride's village and the flesh of that pig is consumed by the followers of the bridegroom on the wedding day. No food is supplied to the bridegroom's party by the bride's father. He treats them with drinks (mainly rice-beer) only.

The bridegroom's father then performs *khaltiriba* (*khalti* means bride-price), i.e. he pays the amount of bride-price to the bride's father. Around 10:00 a.m. the bridegroom begs *khilimba*, i.e. blessings from all the elderly persons who had assembled there. In the open courtyard, the bride's parents and other patrilineal and matrilineal relatives sit according to their seniority and closeness of the degree of relationship. Similarly the bridegroom's father and relatives



also sit facing the bride's relatives. The bride's father then describes in the congregation the virtues of the bride and that of her matriclan. The bridegroom then bows down to all elderly persons according to their seniority. Everybody blesses them and wishes them a happy married life.

These formalities are completed by noon, after which the guests are entertained with rice-beer. At that time the bridegroom is taken to the first chamber of his father-in-law's house and he stays there. Leaving the bridegroom at his father-in-law's place all his companions return to their own village. The following morning he meets the bride and is taken to the inner chamber of the house where cooking is done. The cooking chamber is considered to be a private place where none but the family members have access. By taking the bridegroom to the cooking chamber the Dimasa symbolises his acceptance as a member of the family.

After a few days the bride's party accompanying the newly married couple go to the boy's village. On the way there bride's party also observe *mayofagarbe* and *lamafungba*. When the party arrives at the bridegroom's place they are welcomed by the parents of the bridegroom and are entertained with food and rice-beer. The bride's party leaves the next day but the couple stays at the boy's village for about a week.

The ceremony that follows the marriage is *madaikhilimba*. This means worship of clan gods. This can be observed at any time within one year of marriage. Usually, it is performed by the boy's father within one week of marriage when the couple stays at his place. At the time of *madaikhilimba* a male goat or a fowl is sacrificed to the clan gods. By the observance of this ceremony the girl is formally accepted as a member of her husband's patriclan.

When the couple returns to the girl's house they live there for one year. The period of this stay is called *minhabba*. Though it is obligatory for a newly married couple to stay at the girl's house for one year, nowadays there is a tendency among the Dimasa to reduce the period of *minhabba*.

No priest is usually required to solemnise a marriage. No incantations are chanted either. However, in recent years there is a tendency among the Dimasa of Mikir Hills to engage the

village priest at the time of marriage ceremony. In Hajadisa, the village priest was called for solemnising a marriage. He performed certain rituals by setting a sacrificial dagger on the ground. He worshipped Shivrai<sup>12</sup> and Kamadi<sup>13</sup> as the presiding deity of marriage. The priest chanted, "They are married today with kind permission of Shivrai and Kamadi. May God bless them. Today onwards they have got two fathers and two mothers." This was followed by *khilimba* (blessings). This employment of priest and worship of Shivrai and Kamadi at the time of marriage is unknown in the villages of the North Cachar Hills that are situated in more interior areas. This seems a new introduction to the Dimasa culture due to the influence of Hinduism.

#### OLD AGE AND DEATH

Among the Dimasa the old are not at all cared and well looked after. During old age the Dimasa are deserted by their children as they get busy with their own respective families. They have practically no companion except the little children. If there are any, they seldom visit them.

The old men and women arrange for their livelihood themselves. They scarcely take the help of others. Under unavoidable circumstances they are helped by the village youth as per direction of the village headman. Sometimes the daughter or daughter-in-law helps him by cooking his food. Though in general the Dimasa are a bit indifferent to the old they are never disrespectful to them. When they refer to their old parents they speak with affection and admiration. They speak very high of valour and courageous events of any old man of the community. In important social and ritual affairs their advice and opinion are earnestly sought. The officials of the village council consult the experienced old persons in order to solve complicated cases.

Not all the old men are, however, thus honoured. Only the really intelligent and experienced few can enjoy this privilege. This is more so because most of the old men become senile and naturally middle-aged intelligent members of the community are consulted in solving problems and pronouncing judgments in critical cases.



Ordinarily, the old men are generally peace-loving and reticent and try to avoid trouble. They do not take any active part in community affairs. However, they greatly enjoy social and ceremonial feasts and like to attend festivals very much. During such occasions they recall their past experiences and encourage and inspire the youth by narrating colourful stories of their activities and achievements. The society does not demand anything of great responsibility from old people. The Dimasa are free with them and enjoy the colourful stories narrated by them.

Though the old people usually live by themselves, at the time of death all their children and relations assemble around them. After death sons and daughters together with all the relatives observe mourning and arrange for the funeral. The funeral and post-funeral rituals are observed with great reverence. For those who die childless or have no relatives in the village, the villagers do the needful in an abbreviated fashion.

#### *Funeral Rites*

When a death occurs, a cock is sacrificed or an egg is broken near the head of the dead by a male member of the family. It is believed that the soul of the cock will accompany the deceased to the other world.

The Dimasa cremate their dead. So, in order to carry the deadbody to the cremation ground, locally known as *mangphlang*, a bier (*bangfong*) is made of bamboo and a piece of cloth. The number of bamboos used for making the bier is an important thing to the Dimasa. If more than one bamboo is used for making the bier two buffaloes have to be sacrificed at the time of post-funeral ceremony and those who carry the deadbody get four legs of these buffaloes. If only one bamboo is used for making the bier only one pig is used as the sacrificial animal. The four legs of the animal, however, are given to those who carry the corpse to the cremation ground.

Before carrying it to the cremation ground the deadbody is ceremonially bathed inside the house and then placed on the bier. A *rino*, made of bamboo frame and a piece of cloth having a basket like appearance is carried to lead the funeral procession. It is the Dimasa belief that after death the

spirit of the dead takes shelter in the *rino*.

Both men and women can carry the deadbody. While the deadbody is carried a woman continuously throws paddy and cotton thread on the way leading from the village to the cremation ground. This is called *maiokhrui*, i.e. making a bridge between the dead and the living. An advance party gathers at the cremation ground and collects firewood for the purpose. They also prepare a temporary shelter for the spirit of the dead in the cremation ground. This shelter is known as *jara*. When the funeral procession arrives there the *rino* is opened and the spirit is ceremonially transferred to the *jara*. The left-over of cotton thread that is not required for *maiokhrui* is kept in the *jara* and it is preserved till the post-funeral ceremony is over.

Before setting fire to the pyre rice-beer is offered to the spirit of the deceased at the *jara*. The deadbody is then placed on the pyre arranged with twelve layers of wood with the head pointing to the west. Two sons or in absence, their representatives with torch in hand stand at either side of the dead (not towards the head or feet), touch each other's torch and then set fire to the pyre from both sides. Before fire is set the relatives of the deceased call the dead ancestors of the deceased and request them to treat him sympathetically in the next world. The party waits till the body is burnt into ashes. A piece of charred bone is then preserved under the *jara*. The ashes and other remains are then washed away. After taking a purificatory bath in a nearby pool the funeral party returns to the village.

Two boys welcome the funeral party with *dither*, i.e. holy water prepared by the village priest at the entrance of the village. Everyone touches the holy water and thus purifies himself.

In the day following cremation, the sleeping mat and other articles that have been used by the deceased are kept on the spot where cremation took place. In case of a female a complete loom or some part of it, her used hair oil, comb, and other articles are put there. All garments used by the deceased are burnt along with the dead. A plate or a pitcher made of bellmetal that has been used by the deceased is taken back home after touching it to the fire.



There is no fixed period of mourning nor any set restrictions to the mourners. Usually, the family members of the deceased do not take non-vegetarian or sour food for seven days after the occurrence of death. The clan members observe pollution for one day only.

*Maimutharba*, i.e. post-funeral ceremony is held at a suitable time between the seventh day and a year after the death. It depends on the economic condition of the family. In Dimasa language *maimu* means paddy and *tharba* means purification, i.e. purification of paddy. It is supposed that the paddy gets polluted as soon as a death occurs in a family. The post-funeral ceremony can take place only on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Until the post-funeral ceremony is over, *makhamgarba* or food offering is to be made to the spirit of the dead by one of the elderly members of the family. The food is offered to the *jara* which is believed to be the seat of the deceased's spirit. The relationship between the spirit and the living members of the family is completely severed after the final offering of food or *makhamgarkhaoba*, at the time of annual harvest festival or *busu*.

In case of an unnatural death like suicide, death at childbirth, etc., post-funeral ceremony is performed just after the cremation. Only those persons who have taken part in cremation attend the post-funeral ceremony. The restrictions and taboos associated with an unnatural death are more varied and strict than that of a natural death. In case of any unnatural death the clan members of the deceased of the same village cannot eat fruit or vegetables that grow in creepers. They cannot tear any thread and the women members of the clan have to refrain from any type of weaving for one and a half months.

Of all kinds of unnatural death, death from the injury of a tiger is considered to be the most unfortunate one. No cremation or funeral ceremony is permissible for such a case and the deadbody is simply buried by the clan members at the outskirts of the village. None but the clan members are allowed to touch the deadbody. If there is no clan member of the deceased in the village, the headman of the village will first touch the deadbody. However, in such a death the members

of the entire clan observe death pollution and they remain in that state until the *dangphlaiba*, i.e. expiatory ritual is over.

In the case of death by leprosy, black fever, and similar other diseases, the Dimasa bury their dead and no obsequy is performed. If a person suffers from *thampidiba* (mosquito laying eggs on a sore) he becomes polluted and the members of his family and clan are also considered to be polluted. A ritual offering to *Mongrang Daikho*<sup>14</sup> is arranged for the remedy. When there is no hope for recovery, an expiatory ritual is performed to enable the family to undertake the funeral ritual in the event of death. If the expiatory rite is not performed no funeral can take place.

In case of death of a woman at childbirth the deadbody is cremated and an obsequy is performed. Only the elderly persons can attend the funeral ceremony. Those who have little children, are not allowed to attend any such ceremony. It is believed that if they go there this may cause harm to their young children.

In case of an unnatural death however, everything of the deceased is destroyed except the immovable property and the weapons. It is believed that if someone keeps his belongings, that may cause harm to the keeper.

No religious rites are attached with funeral ceremony except the offerings of food and drinks to the spirit of the dead. It is believed that the more the number of people entertained at the time of post-funeral ceremony, the more happy the spirit of the dead will be, and he will have a prosperous life on rebirth.

#### NOTES

1. The scientific knowledge about the procreation system is not completely known to the Dimasa. According to Dimasa astrology, in spite of physical and sexual fitness of both the spouses, if they fail to procreate a baby, the failure is attributed to the influence of repulsive stars of the spouses. This phenomenon is known as *shreethay*



among the Dimasa. They cite many examples where unproductive couple had children after remarriage with new mates. At first they do not blame either the wife or the husband for childlessness. Even after the second marriage if no child is born then the man concerned is considered to be *garain*, i.e. dry and the woman as *banji*, i.e. barren. Ordinarily, the Dimasa believe that disunity of male and female seeds is the root of childlessness. Instances of having children on mating with a second or a third partner strengthen this belief.

Many scientific knots of the mystery of birth are explained by the Dimasa according to their own traditional belief. To illustrate, they believe that either the improper location of placenta or absence of female seeds is the cause of female fecundity. In case of a man they single out the scarcity of male seeds as the reason for sterility. In addition, they also held unusual length of penis responsible for non-productivity. They think that it ruins the embryo in the formative stage. Impotency is known as *githi* in the Dimasa vocabulary, which means dead sex or desireless. It is also considered as one of the reasons for childlessness. Fecundity is also attributed to irregular menstruation. They believe that irregular menstruation abhors pregnancy or causes miscarriage.

2. Bose, Nirmal Kumar "Theory of Heridity in the Manusamhita," *Bulletin of the National Institute of Science*, No. 21, 1962, pp. 226-227.
3. The ordinary illiterate Dimasa think that a girl can conceive even before experiencing menstruation. The educated Dimasa on the other hand, think that a girl must have experienced menstruation before she conceived. If the girl is too young the flow of menstrual blood may not be visible from outside. This happened in the case of the wife of an executive member of the North Cachar Hills District Council and a daughter was born of such a 'premenstrual' pregnancy. The girl is still alive and her parents are anxious but skeptical about the authenticity of this belief.
4. 'Naisodi-nusodi' is the goddess of child welfare. It is believed that by worshipping her one can become assured of safe child birth.
5. According to Dimasa mythology the rivers are the abodes of spirits. So in order to protect the child and the mother from the wrath of these evil spirits the Dimasa propitiate them by offering eggs.
6. Infection of measles with high fever is a very common disease among the Dimasa new born babies and is locally called *bangla fever*.
7. Performed on the outskirts of the village it is believed to do good to the whole village. The details of *gerba* will be discussed in connection with religious activities of the village in chapter VI.

8. In the Dimasa philosophy there is no concept of salvation of soul. Reincarnation is considered to be the usual course of life beyond death. If someone dies unmarried that cyclical process of life stops there and it is believed that his soul will turn into an evil spirit and it will roam about in this world.
9. *Mayofagarba*, the worship of all gods and goddesses is performed by sacrificing an egg by the boy's father. It is believed by the Dimasa that evil spirits are hovering in the air and are always trying to distress the people when they are on a journey, particularly for ceremonial purposes. If the gods and goddesses are worshipped before starting for a journey it is believed that they will protect the people from the evil influence of spirits.
10. The Dimasa believe that sometimes evil spirits follow the marriage party when they pass through the jungles and get into the village unnoticed. As they are harmful, *lamafungba* is performed in order to prevent their entrance.
11. According to Dimasa tradition, there are some special deities for the welfare of a married couple and the family. On the occasion of any marriage they are worshipped.
12. Shivrai is the most benevolent deity of the Dimasa. According to Dimasa mythology he is the first son of original mother Arikhidima and creator of the world. He has no connection with marriage whatsoever and nowhere in Dimasa mythology Shivrai has been described as the presiding deity of marriage. As he is the most benevolent deity there is a recent tendency among the Dimasa of Mikir Hills to pay him respect at the time of marriage.
13. Kamadi is the consort of Shivrai. In traditional Dimasa mythology there is no mention of any deity like Kamadi. She seems to be a new introduction to the Dimasa culture.
14. *Mongrang Daikho* is a war god. It is held that he has the power to cure the injuries that have been caused at the time of war. In addition, he has a special power to cure pernicious sores. So if someone suffers from any of these diseases offerings are made to this deity.



## Structure of the Society

There is some unique quality in every society by which it could be distinguished from the others. Such uniqueness of the Dimasa society is the descent, system by which it can be singled out in the area. The Dimasa present a case of double descent. By now it is very much well known a fact in Anthropological literature that there is quite a degree of variation in double descent prevalent in different societies. These have been elaborately described in the *African system of Kinship and Marriage* by Radcliffe Brown and Forde. The varied nature of double descent depends on various factors based on a particular culture.

### DESCENT

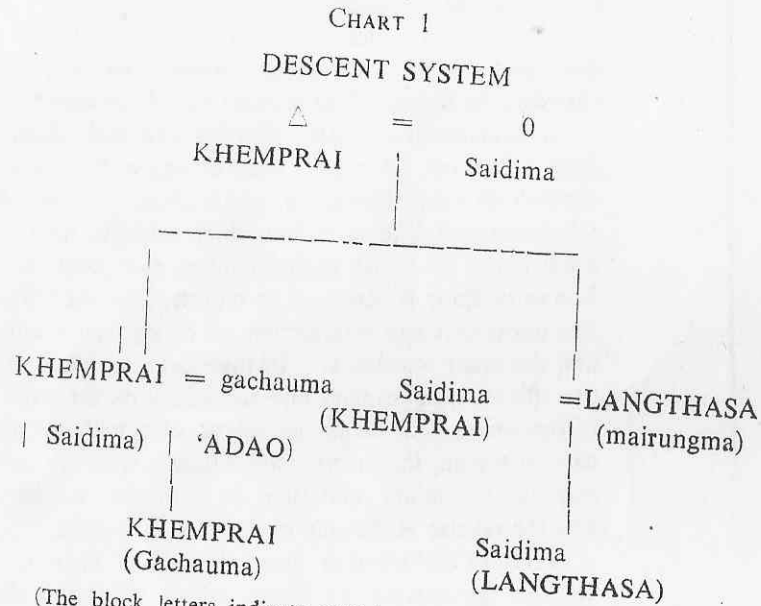
Among the Dimasa both patrilineal and matrilineal system of descent are in vogue. For reckoning their descent they primarily go by sex, i.e. a man primarily reckons his descent from his paternal grandfather and concurrently from maternal grandmother. A woman primarily reckons her descent through her maternal grandmother and then from paternal grandfather. At a first glance though it appears to be a case of parallel descent, the principle that works in Dimasa descent is that of double descent—a combination of matrilineal and patrilineal modes of descent followed concurrently. Murdock<sup>1</sup> writes, "Where double descent prevails, Ego is affiliated with both his maternal grandmother and his paternal grandfather, but not with his maternal grandfather or his paternal grandmother." Among the Dimasa we find that the ego is affiliated with his ancestors through a similar principle with a difference that in this case the importance and intensity of affiliations are not uniform for members of both the sexes. A sort of sexual

dimorphism is observed in this respect and thus the Dimasa case may be described as parallel double descent.

A Dimasa always bears allegiance to two clans. As Murdock points out "A person must belong at the same time, for example to a matrilineal sib, which includes his mother and her relatives through females, but which excludes his father, and to a patrilineal sib which excludes his mother and her relatives." The same thing is observed among the Dimasa. There are also two coexistent and intersecting sib of kingroups one matrilineal and the other patrilineal. In their case we have differentiated the affiliation as primary and secondary on the basis of the sex of the person and his or her relationship with the ancestor. In case of a man, the primary affiliation is with the father's patriclan and secondary affiliation is with the mother's matriclan and the reverse is the rule in the case of women.

Primary affiliation in every individual case is transmitted through generation while secondary affiliation changes along with the changes of generation. A man and his son will belong to the same patriclan while they will belong to different matriclans as the son will inherit his secondary affiliation from his maternal grandmother and the father will inherit the same from his own maternal grandmother. In case of a woman secondary affiliation changes as soon as she gets married, Through the observance of a special ceremony she is transferred to her husband's patriclan while her primary affiliation with the matriclan remains unchanged and is continued through her daughter and daughter's daughter. This phenomenon has been illustrated in Chart 1.





(The block letters indicate patriclan and the small letters indicate matriclan.)

For the discontinuity of one's secondary clan affiliation after one generation, it is out of etiquette among the Dimasa to ask a man or a woman about his matriclan or her patriclan directly. To a man the question is asked in the following way: "What is your *sengfong* and what is your mother's *jaddi*?" To a woman it is asked "What is your *jaddi* and what is your father's *sengfong*?"

#### NATURE OF CLAN

The patriclan and matriclan, in the Dimasa language are referred to by different terms. The clan traced through the male line is known as *sengfong* or patriclan. The clan that is traced through the female line is known as *jaddi* or *julu*, i.e. matriclan.

Both the patri and matriclans are exogamous, nontotemistic and nonlocalised. Ordinarily, there is a concentration of members belonging to a certain patriclan in particular locale but matriclans are highly dispersed. Patriclans are associated with certain religious rites like worship of clan and area gods.

All patriclans have their respective clan gods and area gods. The matriclans, except Madaima, have neither. Sometimes the Dimasa women worship *madaima* and *dilagik*. The women of any matriclan can observe these worships in consultation with the priest. *Sarithaiba* and *khuaphaiba*, however, are observed collectively by the members of individual matriclans. *Saritha* means, curse and *khoba* means, to rescue. It is observed in order to protect the members of respective matriclan from the curse of god. 'Khua' is a wide-mouthed deity of the Dimasa. It is believed that women die in pregnancy or at child birth only when they are cursed by some or possessed by the evil spirit khua. Birth of a blind or dumb or crippled baby is also attributed to the wrath of khua. When these occur to any woman of a particular matriclan, all her clan members observe *sarithaiba* and *khuaphaiba*. This suggests the corporate nature of the matriclans of the Dimasa.

The Dimasa have recently developed a tendency to conceal the existence of matriclans of their women to outsiders. Nowadays girls are sent to school and the name of their respective patriclans are recorded as their surname. This has happened due to their continuous contact with patrilineal people who do not have any matriclan. It has been observed that the educated and the Hindu Burman Kacharis are more reluctant to disclose names of their matriclans. This does not, however, mean that *jaddi* or matriclan as a social institution is becoming weaker. This is rather a very superficial phenomenon and the rules of exogamy in respect of patriclan and matriclan are observed with equal strictness.

Clan exogamy is a general rule among the Dimasa. As far as the marriage rule is concerned a man cannot marry a girl of his father's patriclan and mother's matriclan. A girl also cannot marry a man whose mother belongs to her matriclan and who belongs to her father's patriclan. This suggests that clan exogamy is observed in both the cases of primary and secondary clan affiliation.

Breach of clan exogamy (both patriclan and matriclan) leads to excommunication from the society. The only exception to this rule is found in the case of Thaosen patriclan. The Kachari king made a special sanction to the members of this clan by



allowing them to marry girls of Thaosen clan. No other patri-clan or matriclan has the right to marry within their own clan. Even in the case of the Thaosen, though it is permissible to marry a girl from within the same patriclan, no occurrence of any such marriage could be traced. However, the members of the Thaosen patriclan also cannot marry in their own matriclan.

In the plains, some of the Dimasa have embraced Hinduism. But as they still honour the rule of patriclan and matriclan exogamy, marriage between the Hindu Dimasa and the Hill Dimasa of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills is permissible. Marriage with the Boro Kachari or other subsections of Kacharis, on the other hand is not permissible. As the Boro Kachari and other subsections have no concept of matriclans no marriage can occur between them.

With marriage a girl loses identity with her father's patriclan and joins her husband's patriclan. This is formally solemnised by a ceremony *madaikhilimba* (worship of clan god), observed by the husband's father. However, her original matriclan which is transmitted to her from her mother and mother's mother, remains unchanged and is consequently transmitted to her daughter. For example, a girl of Phonglosa patriclan when married to a man of Thaosen patriclan, immediately becomes a member of the Thaosen patriclan. But she continues to belong to her mother's matriclan and she never adopts her husband's mother's matriclan. Her daughter will also be recognised by her mother's matriclan along with the daughter's of her sisters, who may be married to persons of different patriclans. The only tie that remains with her father's patriclan even after marriage is that in case of remarriage she has to avoid her father's patriclan while selecting a mate. A man, on the other hand, even after marriage remains connected with his mother's matriclan. When a girl is divorced she automatically loses the affiliation to her husband's patriclan and bears her original affiliation.

#### FUNCTIONS OF CLAN

The functions of patriclan and matriclan are enumerated below :

A patriclan primarily determines the descent and placement of an individual in the society, particularly through the male line. When a child is born in the Dimasa society, by virtue of his or her birth he or she becomes the member of the tribe. But his or her relationships with other members of the tribe is determined by his or her affiliation to a clan. All members of the clan in which he or she is born are treated as his or her consanguinal kin. Naturally, a degree of avoidance is observed with the clan members as far as the marriage negotiations are concerned. Thus, a patriclan also regulates marriage of either of the sexes in the Dimasa society.

Likewise a matriclan ordinarily determines the descent and placement of a woman in the society. It also determines the descent of men also, though in the case of men, their recognition to matriclan is of secondary importance. However, as far as the marriage negotiation is concerned the matriclan has as much importance as the patriclan. In this respect a matriclan seems to be somewhat more important to the Dimasa as no violation of matriclan exogamy has been recorded. In the case of patriclans, as stated elsewhere in this study, several cases of violation of exogamy rule have been found both in Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills.

One's affiliation to his clan is pretty strong among the Dimasa. It was observed in Hajadisa that two persons belonging to two different patriclans married two sisters and thus became brothers-in-law. According to the Dimasa custom they should have addressed each other as *sto* (an affinal kinship term). Instead, they called each other brothers. Later it was discovered that they belonged to the same matriclan. It further suggests that one's affiliation to matriclan is quite strong in case of male children also.

The clan tie is so strong among them that if someone fails to fulfil his obligation to his clan members the persons can be sued in the court of law. It happened at Semkhor where a man failed to invite some members of his patriclan and matriclan at the post-funeral feast of his father. The clan members felt very offended at this. The fact was interpreted as if the person did not want to recognise the clan affiliation of the members who were not invited in the feast. They took it as an act of personal



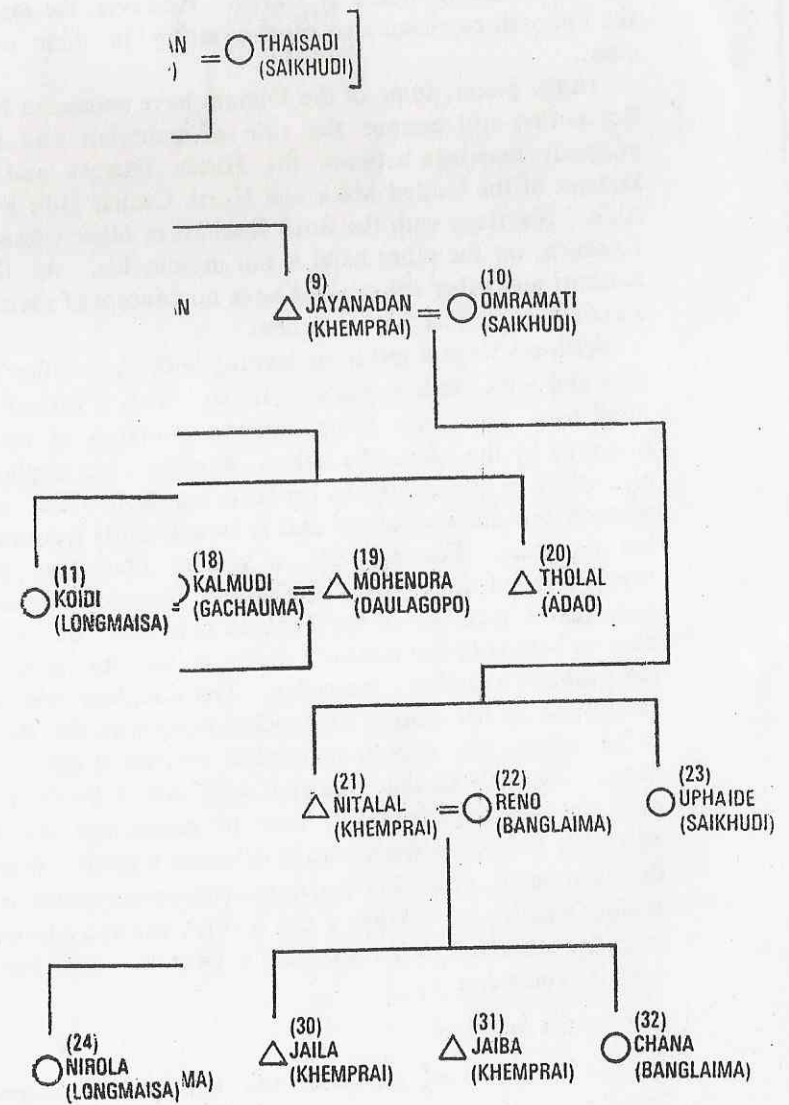
insult and lodged a complaint with the District Council Court.

According to the Dimasa custom when a man dies, an animal, generally buffalo is sacrificed at the time of his funeral feast. The male members of the patriclan of the deceased should always get meat of the backbone of the animal. The female members of the patriclan should always get hind legs of the sacrificed animal. Any violation of this obligation to the clan members is considered as a serious offence. In the case of death of an unmarried woman the same rule is very strictly observed. But if the woman is married, the meat of the backbone of the sacrificed animal should go to the male members of her husband's patriclan. The hindlegs of the animal should also go to the women of her husband's patriclan. This indicated that a woman's affiliation to her patriclan is severed after her marriage.

When the economic condition does not permit a person to sacrifice an animal at the ceremonial feast one plate of vegetable curry and one bamboo phial of rice-beer is offered to the clansmen and clanswomen respectively and substitute for meat of the backbone and hind legs. It may be noted here that this sort of offering and obligation are restricted among the members of the patriclan only. In the case of members of the matriclan there is no such rule.

If an offence is done to a clan member by a person from a different clan, this is usually retaliated without taking the fault of the clan member into consideration. If this offence is done by a member of the same clan the case is judged by the elderly clan members and is ordinarily settled by them. If a clan member dies an unnatural death all the members of the clan are subject to pollution. They are supposed to observe a special ceremony for purification.

The Dimasa belong to widely dispersed patriclans and matriclans. Each clan has its distinctive name that represents some natural objects, animals, and trees. Although totemic names are used to designate clans, the Dimasa do not think that they have descended from these objects. There is also no taboo associated with the clan objects. Neither are the objects venerated by them. The clan objects are merely symbols that represent a group of people. There are a few clan names that suggest





matriclan. Later, of course, such women tried to associate themselves with one or other of the Dimasa matriclans. But all of them did not get full recognition from the society. Though ordinarily such women are not looked down upon, a sort of social stigma is attached to them and often it becomes difficult for them to find out a suitable mate.

The historical explanation provided regarding the origin of matriclan is not sociologically very convincing. Both matriclan and patriclan are vested with equal importance. When we review the functions of Dimasa matriclan and compare them with that of other cases of double descent from the world, the Dimasa case appears to be very much consistent with other examples of double descent. So, in view of the function of matriclan in the Dimasa society there is no reason to believe that matriclan was a later introduction to discourage miscegenation. It may be a fact that being surrounded by people of patrilineal descent the educated section of the Dimasa try to rationalise the existence of double descent among them by putting a pseudo-historical explanation. To the ordinary Dimasa their descent is very unique and traditional.

Some anthropologists are of the opinion that "double descent would result when a people with strongly functional exogamous matrilineal kingroups come to adopt patrilocal residence and to organise politically on a local basis in consequence either of outside contacts or internal adjustment." Among the Dimasa a similar occurrence is possible but their matriclan by no means, appears to be of very recent introduction. Among them matriclan exogamy is the rule and strictly observed. Their residence rule, following the guidance of descent is matripatri-local. Two women belonging to different matriclans are not supposed to stay in the same house. For this reason extension of a family beyond the nuclear type is almost impossible. Though the members of different patriclans are not prohibited to stay in the same house, on the day of worship of their respective clan gods they cannot live together. If under unavoidable circumstances women belonging to different matriclans have been living in the same house, they are separated at the earliest possible opportunity and under no circumstances use each others' garments, hair oil, comb and such other articles.

There is no hierarchical order of the Dimasa patriclans and matriclans. Four of the patriclans and four of the matriclans are called *dauga*. This indicates their close association with the royal court. During the Kachari dynasty the members of the Khemprai, Phonglosa, Riao, and Seingyum patriclans and Bangalaima, Mairungma, Miungma, and Saidima matriclans were closely associated with the royal court and took important roles in the royal activities. Since then they are known as *dauga*. They do not enjoy any special privilege except that the members of these clans are somewhat respected. Members of the clan who are numerically dominant generally hold power in a particular locality. Villages that have been covered by this study have Langthasa as their dominant patriclan. Where the patriclan is too big it becomes divided into *Kisong* or subclan. The Langthasa patriclan has 12 subclans.

The Dimasa system of descent is rather unique in this part of India as no other tribe inhabiting the area has double descent. Existence of double descent is reported from six areas viz., West Africa, Bantu speaking South Africa, India, Australia, Melanesia and Polynesia which are geographically and culturally very distinct. In India, however, the Toda<sup>2</sup> presents a case of double descent. Wherever this system of descent prevails whether in India or Africa or elsewhere it shows certain common attributes like exogamy of matriclan. With few exceptions most of them have patrilocal or matripatri-local residence, patriarchal authority and patrilineal kingroups are more localised and sometimes organised on a local basis.

#### RULES OF MARRIAGE

The influence of Dimasa descent system is reflected over their clan system. Again clan is the major institution which regulates their marriage. However, it would be evident from the description of the whole Dimasa culture how this particular type of descent pervades and permeates in all aspects of their life. The Dimasa are strictly monogamous. Polygyny is never practised. Sequential polygyny, however, is permitted and sometimes practised.

For the purpose of marriage all consanguinal kin are avoided by them. Marriageable affines are also very few in number. For example, a Dimasa cannot marry any affinal kin except



wife's sister, elder brother's wife, mother's brother's daughter, and father's sister's daughter. Mother's female collaterals, e.g. mother's sister, mother's sister's daughter, are always avoided in marriage. Non-marriageability extends upto the extent of members of one's matriclan.

As stated earlier, the Dimasa observe the rule of clan exogamy. As they have a double clan system a man cannot marry a girl of his father's patriclan and mother's matriclan. Breach of either type of clan exogamy leads to excommunication from the society. In some of the villages of Mikir Hills there are cases where the rule of patriclan exogamy had been violated. In Hajadisa of Mikir Hills out of a total of 49 marriages that have been studied, there were 14 such cases where a man married a girl of his own patriclan. In Throkalahkhher also out of a total of 30 marriages eight persons married girls of their respective patriclans. For the breach of clan exogamy, however, they had to pay fines that were imposed by the respective village councils. Though there was a perceptible number of violations of patriclan exogamy there has not been a single case of breach of matriclan exogamy in any of the villages. In Hajadisa out of the total of 14 cases of breach of exogamy rule, except one, all the rest of the 13 cases belong to the Daulagopo clan. The other one belongs to Langthasa clan. There was a case of breach of tribal endogamy rule also at Hajadisa. A girl of Againaju matriclan of that village married a Bengalee youngman of a nearby town. In Throkalahkhher village also all the cases of breach of patriclan exogamy rule have occurred in the Daulagopo clan. In both the villages breach of patriclan exogamy by the members of a particular clan can be explained as follows. Here the majority of the population belongs to Daulagopo clan. They are originally an excommunicated group of people from North Cachar Hills. As no village of that area would provide them with girls to marry, they migrated to Mikir Hills. But when it became difficult for them to get girls for marrying from this area also, they had no alternative but to marry girls from their own patriclan.

As no breach of patriclan rule has been recorded from the villages of North Cachar Hills one can suggest that the villages

of North Cachar Hills are more orthodox in this respect than the villages of Mikir Hills. In reality the picture is not so. In general the breach of this rule is more among the group of Dimasa who were once excommunicated. As neither of the villages of North Cachar Hills have any excommunicated people and as both the villages of Mikir Hills are formed by the once excommunicated group, the comparatively high frequency of breach of this rule is found in the villages of Mikir Hills only.

It has been observed that there is a general tendency among the excommunicated Dimasa to live in close proximity. They are usually looked down upon by the others. If they live in the same village from where they had been excommunicated, they constantly feel a social pressure. Instead, if they live in a village where most of the people belong to excommunicated families there is virtually no such pressure. That is why it is found that newly excommunicated families always tend to migrate to villages that are largely inhabited by other excommunicated groups. Sometimes a group of such people set up a new village and establish a sort of marriage group among themselves. About 75 years ago some people of the village Hajadisa of North Cachar Hills and its neighbourhood were excommunicated and migrated to Mikir Hills and formed the villages of Hajadisa (of Mikir Hills) and Throkalahkhher. The original settlers of the villages of Misapdisa and Lairudisa of Mikir Hills also migrated from the North Cachar Hills for the same reason. In these two villages also the frequency of violation of patriclan exogamy is high. At present these four villages of Mikir Hills have formed a sort of marriage group by themselves and most of their marriage relations have been established among themselves.

As most of the villages of Mikir Hills are formed by the Dimasa who were excommunicated for the breach of marriage rules, in the Mikir Hills area the punishment for such violation is not rigorous. One who has violated the rule is allowed to live in the village as any other villager if he pays a fine that has been imposed by the village council. In the North Cachar Hills, on the other hand such violation of marriage rule is a severe crime and the only punishment for such violation is excommunication. He is never accepted by the Dimasa society



over there and no one will ever establish any matrimonial alliance with him or his family. As a result of this severe punishment it has been found that in the North Cachar Hills areas also a group of such people have migrated from their original villages and formed their own village in Kalachand area of the North Cachar Hills. They also have all their marriage relations among themselves.

Besides the avoidance of patrician and matrician exogamy, a man cannot select a spouse who belongs to the parents' generation, though younger in age. This type of union, if any, is looked down upon. Marriage with a person of children's generation is also prohibited. Cross-cousin marriage of either type (mother's brother's daughter or MBD or father's sister's daughter or FSD), though not prohibited, is not preferred. It is considered an inferior type of marriage. In the Dimasa vocabulary a union between cross-cousin (*hain-daofri*) means relation between pigeons or birds. Out of the 207 cases of marriage that have been studied, only one case of cross-cousin marriage was found from Barawaphu village. This was a FSD type of cross-cousin marriage. Both levirate and sororate are permissible among the Dimasa but they are rarely practised.

#### TYPE OF MARRIAGE

A marriage is usually settled through negotiation. A negotiated type of marriage is called *disingba*.\* This is a very elaborate form of marriage and involves a huge expenditure. The amount of bride price demanded in this type of marriage is very high.

Payment of *khalti*, i.e. bride price is an important feature of Dimasa marriage. It is paid to honour the matrician of the girl. The bridegroom's father gives it to the bride's parents. In absence of parents, it is taken by the mother's sister of the bride. The amount of bride-price in North Cachar Hills varies between Rs 45 and Rs 250. In Mikir Hills it is comparatively low being Rs 30 to Rs 45 only. As most of the marriages here are settled by the boys and girls themselves, the custom of paying bride-price is observed in a taken form.

The ceremony of marriage continues for two days. Unlike the abbreviated form of marriage, *disingba* is solemnised in the

\* Details of marriage ceremony have been described in Chapter 1.

open courtyard. As mentioned earlier, on the day of marriage the bridegroom is not permitted to enter into the inner chamber or kitchen of the bride's house. He is not permitted to see the bride either. The next day he is entertained in the kitchen and is allowed to live with the bride. Thereby, he is accepted as one of the members of the family.

There are some less expensive and abbreviated types of marriages which are taken recourse to by the poor. This abbreviated type of marriage is known as *habriba*. When a man cannot afford to pay the usual bride-price, he takes recourse to this form. The rites of this type of marriage are limited and the marriage takes place inside the house. In this type, the bridegroom is allowed to enter into the kitchen on the same day of marriage and meet the bride. *Hablaba* is another type of marriage and it has a very rare occurrence. Here the groom is extremely poor and cannot spend anything for any ceremony. He simply bows down to the bride's father and pays Rs 5 as a token bride-price. When the bride's father accepts that money this makes the boy and the girl husband and wife and then onwards they are allowed to live together. *Khaolaba* is a marriage by mutual consent of the boy and girl. Sometimes to avoid the bride-price, they elope from the village temporarily. After few days they return to the village and live as husband and wife. When such elopement is not possible the girl intrudes into the house of the boy forcibly and stays there until she is accepted as wife of that particular boy. Usually the boy has got full support for such act of the girl though in public he demonstrates the reverse attitude. The occurrence of this type of marriage is also rare. *Khaolaba* though tolerated is not much appreciated in the society.

If a marriage takes place between a widow and a widower it is known as *lahiba*. It means to bring. The widower brings a widow to his house and begins to live with her as her husband. Few village elders may or may not be entertained with rice-beer at *lahiba*. If the widower is rich and the widow is young, father of the bride may demand a sum of money as bride-price. This type of marriage is quite common in the Dimasa villages.

The Dimasa marriage is contractual in nature and the



ritualistic aspects are somewhat insignificant. There is no priest or religious ceremony to solemnise a marriage. To them marriage is a social phenomenon, hence social recognition is the main objective in marriage. In order to have that recognition each and every villager is invited and entertained with rice-beer on the occasion. The most important aspect of Dimasa marriage is to take the blessings (*khilimfy*) from the elders. On the first day of marriage the bridegroom and the bride bow down to the elders who wish them a long and happy life. In this way the newly-wed couple gets acceptance in the society. The only religious rite of a marriage is *madai khilimba* which concerns worship of clan god and transfer of the girl from her father's patriclan to her husband's patriclan. The bridegroom's father usually arranges it a few days after the marriage.

#### RESIDENCE AFTER MARRIAGE

The newly married couple has to live in the wife's house for one year. This is called *minhabba*. Though it was a must for a newly married couple to observe *minhabba*, the present generation sometimes does not seem to be very keen to observe it. However, after this period the couple is free to choose the site for their residence. In Barawaphu out of a total of 44 marriages in the present generation in 31 cases boys left their own village and settled in the villages of their respective father-in-law. Only in 13 cases boys continued to live in their parental village but separately from their father. In the case of girls of the same village, out of a total of 32 marriages 16 had gone to live in their husband's village and the other 16 remained at Barawaphu.

Though spouses are selected from within a radius of about 40 miles village exogamy is not a rule. At Hajadisa 29 of the total number of marriages of the present generation have taken place within the village. The newly wedded men built their new houses and lived by the side of their respective wife's father though all of them lived with them prior to marriage and there was also enough space for construction of new houses adjacent to that of their father's. In Barawaphu village also few persons did not return to their natal village after completion

of the period of *minhabba*. They built their houses by the side of their father-in law's houses.

#### DIVORCE

Divorce is permissible among the Dimasa though its occurrence is very rare. Divorce may be sought by either of the spouses on the ground of adultery, physical torture, lunacy, impotency, and barrenness. In the case of any physical or mental disorder of one of the spouses, the village elders themselves voluntarily compel the husband or wife to seek divorce. In the usual course, if a wife wants to divorce without any fault of her husband, she has to return the bride-price to the husband but if a man wants a divorce without showing any fault of his wife he cannot claim the return of the bride-price. When a marriage is declared void the woman usually returns to her father's village. Though she does not always live with her father in the same house, she likes to live in the midst of her primary kin. According to the divorce rule of the Dimasa the male children of the couple are given to the father and female children stay with their mother.

The importance of double descent is reflected in the rules of inheritance of the Dimasa as well. Theoretically property moves from father to son, i.e. along the male line. The property of a woman goes to her daughter and never to her son or son's wife. But in most of the cases the Dimasa have hardly any property that their children would be eager to inherit. The married sons, in general, are somewhat careless or indifferent about their old parents. The daughters, on the contrary, are often found taking care of their widowed mother and this is considered their duty. Old widower father is also looked after by the daughters. A man is ordinarily more interested in helping his mother-in-law than his mother.

#### THE FAMILY

The Dimasa do not have any concept of lineage organisation. The family is the strongest structural and most functional unit of the Dimasa social organisation. The members of a family always cooperate in every walk of life. In a family economic responsibility is shared by all the members jointly.



When a Dimasa talks of his family he includes himself, his wife and children. The married children are usually excluded from the family unit. Though in some rare cases married daughters are found living with their parents even after the period of *minhabba*, they structurally do not belong to their parents' family. According to Dimasa residence rule, women of different matriclans cannot live in the same house. It is because of this, a married man is expected to set up his own house within one year of marriage.

In a family both men and women work in agricultural fields though there are specified jobs for members of either of the sexes. Until the sons and daughters get married they work in their father's agricultural fields jointly and they have got no personal claim to that earning. Of course, the father helps the sons to build their new houses when they get married and sometimes presents a pair of buffaloes and some wet land as and when these are available. This process is repeated throughout generations. When a daughter sets up her separate establishment, her mother usually gives her clothes and other household articles.

#### *Composition of Family*

As stated earlier, a Dimasa family normally consists of spouses and their unmarried children. But in many cases married daughters and their respective husbands have been found living in the family. It has also been stated that it is a Dimasa custom that a married daughter and her husband live at her father's place until the period of *minhabba* is over. As some of them continue to stay there even after that period the frequency of this type of extension of family is more than the other types. Besides a wife's old widowed mother, sister's daughter or brother's daughter (if her matriclan permits to live jointly) are found to be accommodated in a family, particularly in case of any emergency. It has been observed in a number of cases at Barawaphu that the wife's old widowed mother lives in the house of her married daughter.

An ordinary simple family becomes composite in nature when there are step-children in the family. The number of such families are not many among the Dimasa. Next to the

simple family is the frequency of broken family as death is always an unavoidable phenomenon. When one of the spouses dies the widow or widower lives with the unmarried children; in such cases, rarely do they share the residence with the married son or daughter. In some cases it is observed that with the sequential or simultaneous death of both the spouses the brothers and sisters live together till they get married.

The frequency of extended family is very low among the Dimasa. As stated earlier, vertical extension with son's family is not possible as two women of non-identical matriclans cannot live in the same house. However, some irregular types of extended families are found among them. This type of extension is found where a woman is a widow and there is none to look after her except her married daughter. Here the daughter's family gets extended irregularly by the presence of her mother. When a married daughter and her husband live more or less permanently with her widowed mother, that also forms a kind of irregular type of extended family. Here the family of the widowed mother has been extended through the female line by the presence of her married daughter and her husband. Both these types of extended families were found at Barawaphu and the latter type alone was found at Hajadisa. In the first type of irregularly extended family, the son-in-law is the head of the family. But in the latter type the mother-in-law is the head of the family. After her death the son-in-law becomes the head of the family provided she does not have any direct adult male heir. As the married brothers and sisters do not live together after marriage the frequency of laterally extended family is also rare.

The Dimasa families are, in general, small in size. Though sometimes a few large families are found, their frequency is less. The average of family size of the four villages is 4.5.

#### ADOPTION

The childless family is a rare occurrence in a Dimasa village. If there is any couple without any issue or whose possibility of having a baby is slim they usually adopt a baby. Adoption is permissible according to their custom and is sometimes practised. A childless man can adopt any boy of his patriclan



and the adopted son has the right to perform obsequy of his adopted father. He inherits half of the property of his adopted father and the other half goes to the collateral kin of the deceased. If the adopted son belongs to a different patriclan he cannot participate in the worship of clan god of his adopted father as even after adoption his original patriclan remains unchanged.

Adoption of a girl is seldom found among the Dimasa. When it is practised, extra care is taken to select a girl from the same matriclan of her adopted mother. As stated earlier, two women of different matriclans cannot live in the same house. Naturally it delimits the possibility of selection of a girl as an adopted child.

Though theoretically adoption is permissible in the Dimasa society, in practice it seldom occurs. Among the villages covered by this study there was no occurrence of a single case of adoption.

#### INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

In the Dimasa society conjugal life is more emphasised than consanguinal tie. So it is found that when one of the spouses dies the other becomes helpless and remains uncared. Sometimes a widowed mother is looked after by her daughter while the widower father mostly lives alone. There is no insurance of old age infirmity in their society.

In a family the relation between the husband and the wife is very deep though there is very little overt expression of it. They cooperate in every sphere of life. A husband seldom does anything without consulting his wife. In fact they are too loyal to each other and a wife does not do anything against her husband's will. Premarital sex relations is somehow tolerated in the society but after marriage they usually do not indulge in extramarital sex relations.

The husband and wife do not talk much and their mutual behaviour apparently seem to be cold to an outsider. But as it is the Dimasa custom not to talk to each other in the presence of others without any specific reason, the relation between husband and wife appears to be cold. They do not call each other by name. It is a taboo. Only during leisure hours husband

and wife indulge in light gossip even in presence of others. This too, in fact, is a rare occurrence. They, however, do not hesitate to work together when required.

Parent-child relationship is very affectionate. Children are not usually afraid of their father. As there is usually no other member in the family but the parents and the children, the father and the mother take care of the children by turns. This system gives enough scope for personal contact between parents and children and as a result a deep emotional attachment grows between them. The attachment of the mother to her children is so deep that a young widow or divorced mother often prefers not to remarry, in spite of many handicaps to stay a widow, as this may cause difficulties to her children. Up to the age of five to six, children of either sex are equally attached to their mother. Their attachment is comparatively less with their father. When they grow up the girls remain more or less equally attached with their mother. Boys usually develop a detached view about their family of orientation. But they seldom ignore the authority of their father.

Sons and daughters live with parents until they are married. It was noticed at Hajadisa that the daughters like to stay near their parents' house while the sons prefer to set up new houses after marriage near the house of their respective mother-in-law. In Barawaphu village married sons often shifted to their respective wife's village.

It was also observed from day-to-day behaviour of the individuals that the daughters visit their mother's house more frequently than the boys do. The Dimasa very much like to visit markets and it is almost a part of their daily routine. After returning from the market, married couple usually assemble at their mother's (wife's mother) house, if they happen to live in the same village, for relaxation and gossip. On the other hand men seldom visit their father's and once married out they maintain very little connection. A mother also very often goes to her daughter's houses but never to her son's. The son's-in-law prefer the company of their respective fathers-in-law and wife's brother while going to collect honey from the forest. Married sons seldom come forward to help their widow mother. In the villages of North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills customarily



the sons are to observe *busugaba*\* (homage to the elders) at the time of *busu*\*\* festival but in practice very few observe it.

Ideally, a son-in-law has no duty to perform towards his mother-in-law on the contrary the social rules demand that the son should look after his widowed mother or invalid parents. But in actual practice the reverse is found more often than the ideal. Married son becomes indifferent to his parents day by day, because with his marriage the interaction between mother and son decreases gradually. However, the father and the son do support each other when a friction arises outside the family circle. Though the intimate relationship between a father and a son fades away to a great extent with the passage of time, it does not totally vanish. After the death of the parents both sons and daughters observe post-funeral ceremony. I had the opportunity to observe a post-funeral ceremony at Throkalangher where the son talked about the deceased father with great feelings of respect, emotion, and admiration. In a few cases it was also observed that the son's wife had pounded paddy for the old father-in-law and the mother-in-law looked after the daughter-in-law at childbirth though they live in separate houses. The degree of closeness of relationship, however, varies from person to person. It depends mostly on individual temperament and the degree of personal contact.

The relationship between siblings is quite happy. Generally, the eldest of the siblings holds a superior position and others show respect to him or her. There is no formal obligation on either side and perhaps for that reason there is hardly any conflict between siblings. It is commonly observed that married sisters often visit married brothers' house if they happen to live in the same village. Contrarily, married brother or brother's wife very seldom visits the sister's house. Two married brothers do not visit each other without any specific reason. Theoretically, it is the social custom to look after one's brother or sister whenever necessity arises. But there happened to be no occasion to observe any such behaviour. Unmarried brothers and sisters live jointly and treat one another very

\* For details vide Chapter V.

\*\* For details vide Chapter V.

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From the kinship behaviour and other social behaviour it appears that women play a significant role in the family. They are the central figures in the sphere of emotional bondage. Otherwise, men are ordinarily indifferent in maintaining social relationships. They are very much occupied with their routine work. It is the woman who communicates with her matrikin more. Importance of women may, however, be due to double descent. The matrikin for the individual has a special significance for exerting emotional influence more than the formal patrilineal group.

#### AUTHORITY AND DIVISION OF LABOUR

The authority lies in the hands of the male head of the family. He has the command over other members of the entire family. Even the adult sons until they marry and establish their own families, simply carry out orders of their father. Contrarily, the female head of the household or the housewife is always submissive. The male head decides the quantity of land to be cultivated and attaches various agricultural jobs to different members of the family. As the wife shares the economic responsibilities of the family, in some important matters her advice is also taken into account. But this is neither obligatory nor is the male head of the family bound to accept her terms or suggestions. The cash money derived from the income of the family is deposited with the male head of the family and he is free to spend this money in accordance with his plans. Only in case of selection of spouses of his children the male head of the family does not exert any authority. The male head represents the family in the village council and casts vote in the election of village officials. Though other male adults of the family have the right to cast vote they seldom do so. Even when they do, they simply support the



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From the kinship behaviour and other social behaviour it appears that women play a significant role in the family. They are the central figures in the sphere of emotional bondage. Otherwise, men are ordinarily indifferent in maintaining social relationships. They are very much occupied with their routine work. It is the woman who communicates with her matrikin more. Importance of women may, however, be due to double descent. The matrikin for the individual has a special significance for exerting emotional influence more than the formal patrilineal group.

#### AUTHORITY AND DIVISION OF LABOUR

The authority lies in the hands of the male head of the family. He has the command over other members of the entire family. Even the adult sons until they marry and establish their own families, simply carry out orders of their father. Contrarily, the female head of the household or the housewife is always submissive. The male head decides the quantity of land to be cultivated and attaches various agricultural jobs to different members of the family. As the wife shares the economic responsibilities of the family, in some important matters her advice is also taken into account. But this is neither obligatory nor is the male head of the family bound to accept her terms or suggestions. The cash money derived from the income of the family is deposited with the male head of the family and he is free to spend this money in accordance with his plans. Only in case of selection of spouses of his children the male head of the family does not exert any authority. The male head represents the family in the village council and casts vote in the election of village officials. Though other male adults of the family have the right to cast vote they seldom do so. Even when they do, they simply support the



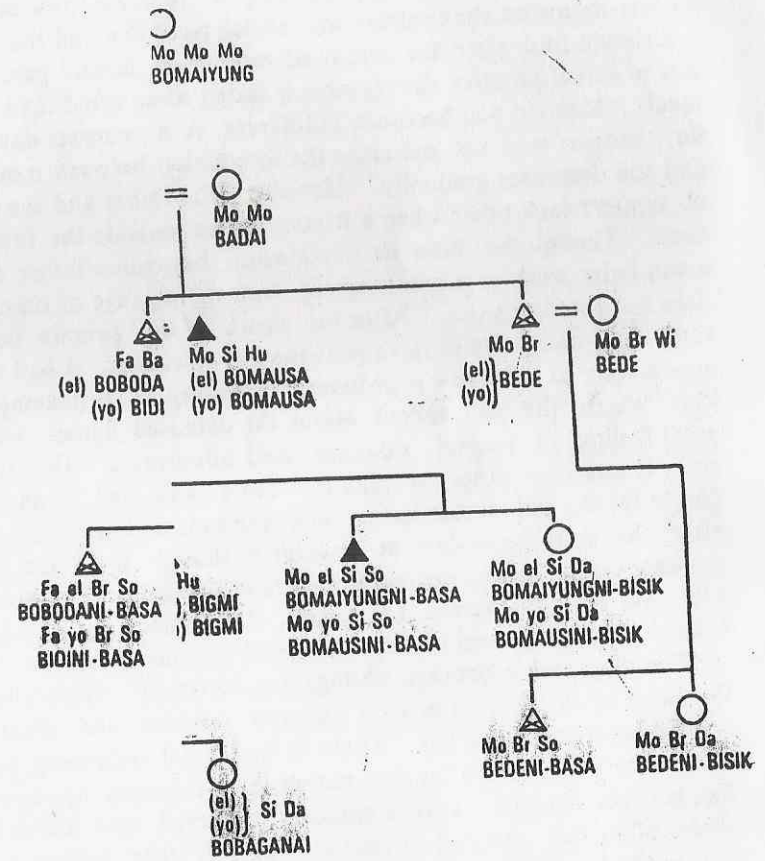
nominee of the head of the family.

In the absence of male head the wife is considered as the head of the family and the authority is vested in her. She then controls her family both socially and economically. In no case an adult son or daughter or the son-in-law achieves this authoritative position during his/her life time. As the women in the Dimasa society do not have any right to cast vote she has no say in the village council. There the adult son represents the family in absence of the father. However, it can be said that the husband and wife form the central pivot of the family unit and by their joint effort they run the family.

The different members of the family are assigned various roles. The male head of the family is solely responsible for economic matters. It is he who has to provide food and shelter to other members of the family. The political responsibility is also vested in him and he is expected to behave in such a way as should never tell upon the family prestige. In other words, he is to organise his activities in such a way that they should enhance prestige and prosperity of the family.

The domestic responsibilities are entirely borne by the housewife. Sometimes she can allocate a particular job to her daughter but she is supposed to plan and organise everything in that respect. Child rearing and training of the children, specially of daughters are done by the female head of the family. A girl of tender age is taught by her mother how to weave. When she is somewhat grown up, her mother takes her along when going to the market or to the agricultural field. There by observation and actual participation she learns the activities that a grown up woman should do. Up to the age of five or six the boys are also socialised by their mother. After that period the *nodrang* (bachelor's dormitory) takes responsibility of their socialisation. But in fact, until marriage most of the boys work as per direction of their fathers.

Unlike the mother, the father does not keep constant contact with the sons. In fact, men have no definite role for training their children. When the sons are 14 or 15 years of age, by virtue of their own interest they learn most of the agricultural activities. Then onward the father assigns them to



REFERENCES:  
 ○—INDICATES TRANSMISSION OF MATRICLAN  
 △— " " " PATRICLAN  
 el.—ELDER  
 yo.—YOUNGER



different types of agricultural job or honey collection. A father, however, takes extra care to develop a high moral sense in his children.

A clear-cut division of labour is also noticed in a Dimasa family. A man is responsible for the heavy work relating to agriculture, e.g. cutting of big trees, clearing of jungles, spade-work, etc. In this sort of work he is always assisted by his adult sons. The female members of the family, on the other hand, do light jobs like sowing of seeds, weeding, harvesting of crops. It is the duty of women to visit the market for small commercial transactions. They carry saleable goods there and buy the articles of daily necessities. Big commercial transactions, particularly with the wholesale dealers are always made by the male head of the family.

The women are responsible for pounding paddy, cooking, fetching water and firewood for the entire family. The male members render very little assistance in this respect. It is the duty of a mother to feed her children and to keep them clean. The husband sometimes babysits when his wife is too busy with household work. The wife also weaves loin cloth for her husband and children. In this way all individual members of a family cooperate in different activities and help running the family properly.

#### KINSHIP

Both consanguinal and affinal relationships form the characteristic features of Dimasa kinship system. But the most important single phenomenon that characterises the Dimasa kinship structure is the presence of both patriclan and matriclan. The blood relationship among the Dimasa is traced through both the male and female ancestors. The male agnates are called *sengfongsi*, i.e. the members of the same *sengfong* or patriclan. The female agnates are called *jaddisi* that means, members of the same *jaddi* or matriclan. Though broadly speaking, members of both the sexes are sometimes included in the membership of a *sengfongsi*, the membership of *jaddisi* is strictly limited to the female members. In general, each Dimasa village included a number of patriclans that are linked through marriage. Almost all the households in a village are thus



interrelated with one another and form a kindred. The lineage concept is very feeble among the Dimasa. As the clan solidarity is overemphasised, the lineage as such has no specific function in their social structure.

#### *Kinship Categories*

The consanguinal kin traced through the male line ordinarily constitute the Dimasa primary kin. The affinal kin who are related through marriage, though are given equal importance in the Dimasa social structure, do not belong to the category of primary kin. However, an extra importance is specially put upon the wife's female kin.

The Dimasa kinship terminology includes 33 consanguinal and 13 affinal terms. These 46 terms, on the basis of their specific characteristics, can be classified as denotative, classificatory, and descriptive terms. Table 8 gives the distribution of various kinship terms of the Dimasa.

TABLE 8

#### *Distribution of Various Kinship Terms*

Denotative	Classificatory	Descriptive
<i>bofa, boma</i>	<i>aju, bodaj</i>	<i>bobodani-basa</i>
<i>bidi, bomadi</i>	<i>bobaganai</i>	<i>bobodani-bisik</i>
<i>bomausi, mousa,</i>	<i>boai, bobauji</i>	<i>bodani-basa/bisik</i>
<i>boda, bofung</i>	<i>bigini</i>	<i>mausini-basa/bisik</i>
<i>bubi, bahandao</i>	<i>bobraulng</i>	<i>bedeni-basa/bisik</i>
<i>basa, bisik</i>	<i>basuthai</i>	<i>bubini-basa/bisik</i> (women speaking)
<i>bahamjik</i>	<i>bahao, busuma</i>	<i>bahandaoni-basa/bisik</i> (women speaking)
<i>bajamadi, basai,</i>	<i>bajamaing</i>	<i>bofungni-basa/bisik</i> (men speaking)
<i>bihi, bojalji,</i>	<i>boboda</i>	
<i>bishido</i>	<i>bomaiung</i>	
	<i>bede</i>	
Total 18	14	14

From Table 8 it can be seen that though there are quite a few classificatory and descriptive terms among the Dimasa their terminological system is overloaded with denotative terms. The denotative terms are used to refer to all primary kin and relatives who are directly linked with the family. These are specific terms used to denote a particular type of relationship. The classificatory terms primarily refer to grandparents and grandchildren. The descriptive kinship terms are used to refer to cousin and nephews.

#### *Consanguinal Kinship Terms*

TABLE 9

#### *Kinship Terms of Ascending Generations*

Relation	Third ascending generation	
	Terms of reference	Terms of address
Fa Fa Fa	<i>Boboda</i>	<i>boda</i>
Fa Fa Mo	<i>bomaiung</i>	<i>maiung</i>
Relation	Second ascending generation	
	Terms of reference	Terms of address
FaFa, MoFa	<i>aju</i>	<i>baju</i>
FaMo, MoMo	<i>bodai</i>	<i>adai</i>
Relation	First Ascending Generation	
	Terms of reference	Terms of address
Fa	<i>bofa</i>	<i>apai</i>
Mo	<i>boma</i>	<i>amai</i>
Fa el Br	<i>boboda</i>	<i>boda</i>
Fa el BrWi	<i>bomaiung</i>	<i>maiung</i>
Fa yo Br	<i>bidi</i>	<i>adi</i>
Fa yo BrWi	<i>bomadi</i>	<i>madi</i>
Fa Si (el,yo)	<i>betle</i>	<i>ade</i>
Fa Si Hu	<i>bede</i>	<i>ade</i>
Mo el Si	<i>bomaiung</i>	<i>maiung</i>
Mo yo Si	<i>bomausi</i>	<i>mausi</i>
Mo Si Hu	<i>mousa</i>	<i>mousa</i>
Mo Br (el, yo)	<i>bede</i>	<i>ade</i>
Mo Br Wi	<i>bede</i>	<i>ade</i>



Table 9 gives the distribution of terms of reference and terms of address of the Dimasa kinship system for the third, second, first ascending generations. It may be noted here that for each term of reference there is a separate term of address.

TABLE 10

*Kinship Terms of Ego's Generation*

Relation	Terms of reference	Terms of address
elBr	<i>boda</i>	<i>ada</i>
elBrWi	<i>bobauji</i>	<i>bauji</i>
yoBr	<i>bofiung</i>	<i>ajong</i>
yoBrWi	<i>boat</i>	<i>boatrao</i>
elSi	<i>bubi</i>	<i>abi</i>
yoSi	<i>bahandao</i>	by name
elSiHu	<i>bigimi</i>	<i>agmi</i>
yoSiHu	<i>bigimi, (boat-women speaking)</i>	<i>agmi (boairao-women speaking)</i>
FaBrSo	<i>bobodani-basa</i>	) All Cousins are addressed as own brother and sister according to seniority and juniority
FaBrDa	<i>bobodani-bisik</i>	
FaSiSo	<i>bedeni-basa</i>	
FaSiDa	<i>bedeni-bisik</i>	
MoSiSo	<i>mousini-basa</i>	
MoSiDa	<i>mousini-bisik</i>	
MoBrSo	<i>bedeni-basa</i>	
MoBrDa	<i>bedeni-bisik</i>	

Table 10 gives the distribution of consanguinal kinship terms of ego's own generation. It may be noted here from the Table that all the cousins are equated with own brothers and sisters according to seniority and juniority.

Table 11 gives the distribution of kinship terms of the first and second descending generation of the Dimasa and Table 12 gives the distribution of affinal kinship terms.

TABLE 11

*Kinship Terms of Descending Generations*

Relation	First descending generation	
	Terms of reference	Terms of address
So	<i>basa</i>	by name
SoWi	<i>bahamjik</i>	<i>bahamjikrao (brao)</i>
Da	<i>bisik</i>	by name
DaHu	<i>bajamadi</i>	<i>bajamadirao (brao)</i>
BrSo (men speaking)	<i>badani-basa</i>	by name
BrDo (men speaking)	<i>bodani-bisik</i>	by name
SiSo/Da (men speaking)	<i>bodani-bisik</i>	<i>ade</i>
BrSo/Da (women speaking)	<i>bobaganai</i>	<i>ade</i>
SiSoDa (el,yo) (women speaking)	<i>bubini-basa bisik</i> <i>bahamdaoni-basa bisik</i>	<i>mousa</i>
Relation	Second descending generation	
	Terms of reference	Terms of address
SoSo	<i>basuthai</i>	<i>aju</i>
SoDa	<i>basuthai</i>	<i>adai</i>
DaSo	<i>basuthai</i>	<i>aju</i>
DaDa	<i>basuthai</i>	<i>adai</i>

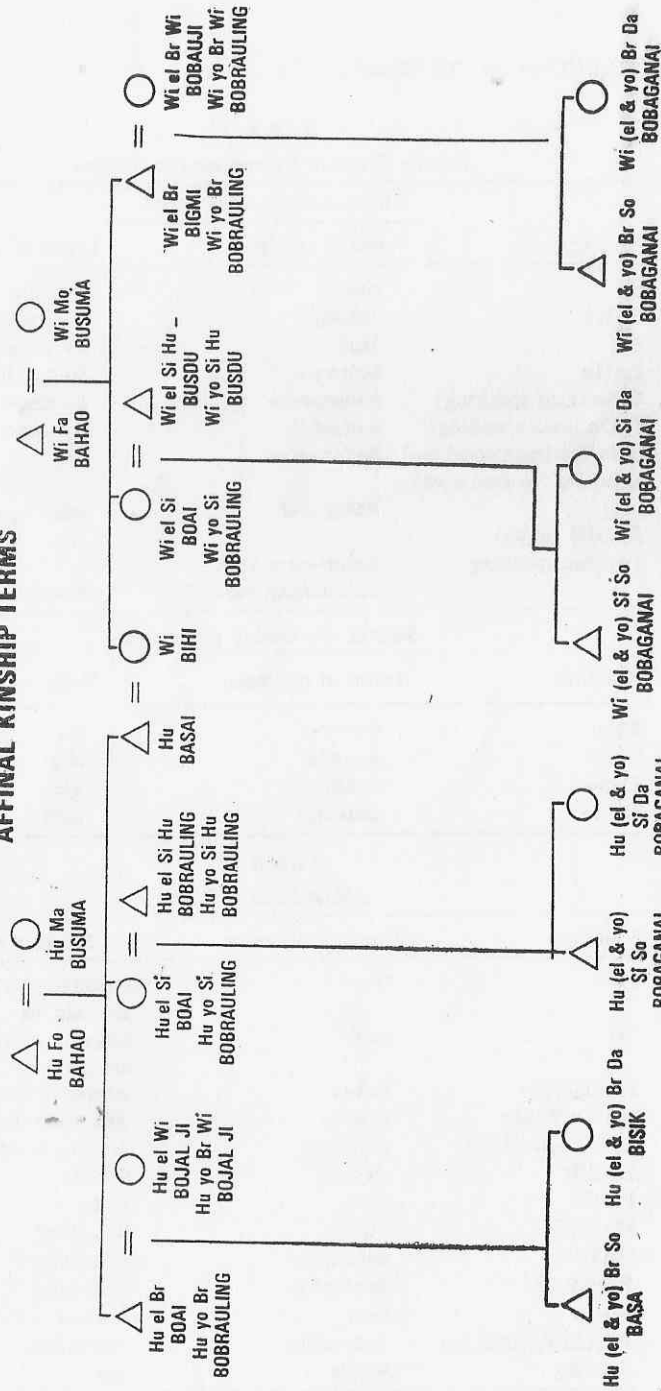
TABLE 12

*Affinal Kinship Terms*

Relation	Terms of reference	Terms of address
Hu	<i>basai</i>	addressing as father of his children
Wi	<i>bihi</i>	addressing as mother of her children
HuFa,WiFa	<i>bahao</i>	<i>garasarao (brao)</i>
HuMo,WiMo	<i>busuma</i>	<i>grasikrao (brao)</i>
SoWiFa, DaHuFa	<i>bajamaing</i>	<i>jamaing or agmi</i>
HuelBr	<i>boai</i>	<i>boairao</i>
HuelSi	<i>boai</i>	<i>bauji</i>
HuBrWi	<i>bojalji</i>	like sister
HuSiHu	<i>bobrauling</i>	<i>bobrauling</i>
HuyoBr/Si	<i>bobrauling</i>	<i>bobrauling</i>
WielSi	<i>boai</i>	<i>boairao</i>
Wiyosi,WiBr(el,yo)	<i>bobrauling</i>	<i>bobrauling</i>
WiSiHu	<i>bihido</i>	<i>sto</i>



CHART 4  
AFFINAL KINSHIP TERMS



Analysis of Terminology

From a close observation of the Dimasa kinship terms it can be said that their terminological system is bilateral, generational, and is determined by mainly sex and seniority and the degree of affinity. Except the second ascending generation the other terms are bilateral, e.g. FaBr and MoBr have different terms. In the Ego's generation cousins have neither specific terms nor the terms for sibling are applied to them. They are described as *bobodani-basa* or *bisik*, *bedeni* or *bisik*, etc., i.e. the son and daughter of so and so. Similarly, a man or a woman does not extend the term for son and daughter to his or her brother's son and daughter. They are described as *bodani-basa* or *bisik* and *hubiri-basa/bisik*. Only for the cross nephew there is a term, i.e. *babaganai*.

Sex wise differentiation is marked in almost all the terms except in case of a few terms namely, *bobrauling*, *bobaganai*, *boai* and *bede* which are used for both the male and female kin. Speaker's sex is not taken into account except in case of two terms referring to younger sister's husband and younger brother's wife. There are some reciprocal terms namely *boai* (HuelBr and yoBrWi) *bobauji* (HuelSi and BrWi); The same term is also used for a number of other kin.

In Ego's generation the siblings have different terms according to sex and seniority. But the cousins are addressed by the same term which are applied to one's own siblings. One does not address a person younger than him or her by kinship term but by his or her personal name. To show respect to an elderly person the younger person uses *rao* as suffix to the term of address or call *brao*. This is the general usage of teknonymy in the society according to which while addressing a man or a woman a Dimasa talks of him or her as father or mother of so and so. This system of address is preferable to the original terms of address. In the father's generation the father is differentiated from his brothers. The mother is not equated with her female siblings either. In the parents generation father's brothers too have different terms according to seniority but father's sisters are not distinguished. Mother's sisters have separate terms according to seniority but for referring to the



mother's brothers the Dimasa have a single term. In the grandparents generation this distinction is not maintained. In the children's generation, son, brother's son, and sister's son are terminologically differentiated but they are treated identically.

The following are important criteria that determine the principles of classification of the Dimasa kin.

1. It maintains strictly the generational difference, i.e. no term is used for two or more kin belonging to different generations with a few exceptions, namely *taboda* which refers to father's grandfather and father's elder brother and *bomaiung* which refers to father's grandmother and father's elder brother's wife.
2. The sex of the person referred to is always clearly differentiated. That is, no single term is employed for man or woman relative except the term *bede* which refers to mother's brother and father's sister and *bobaganai* which refers to sister's son and sister's daughter.
3. Distinction between consanguinal and affinal kin is maintained.
4. The principle of collaterality appears clearly in the first ascending generation where a sharp distinction is made between people of one's direct line of ascent and collaterals. In the first and second descending generation this principle again works when distinction is made between one's own children and all other children of the siblings. There are two terms for the latter which are descriptive.
5. Siblings are not merged with the parallel or cross cousins.
6. Relative age is differentiated for all individuals of ego's own or ascending generation.
7. The sex of the speaker is not discriminated. Only in two cases the sex of the speaker is courted, viz. *bobaganai* is used by the male and female when they refer to sister's children and brother's children respectively. Similarly *boairao* is referred to younger brother's wife and younger sister's husband by male and female respectively.

8. No distinction is, however, made between paternal and maternal grandfather and between husband's parent and wife's parents.

9. Polarity is recognised in the term *bigimi* which refers to wife's brother or sister's husband which are reciprocally used.

10. Terms of reference are different from terms of address. An analysis of the Dimasa kinship terminology reveals the following interesting features.

1. In the parents' generation father's brother and mother's sisters are terminologically distinguished according to seniority, whereas no distinction is made between father's sisters and mother's brothers. On the other hand both the relations are referred to by a common term.

2. In the ego's generation all cousins are referred to by descriptive terms. Siblings have distinct terms according to age and sex.

3. In the son's generation there are distinctive terms for one's own children. But brother's children are referred to by distinctive terms according to their sex by a male speaker but are given a distinct term when the speaker is a female. Brother's children and sister's children are referred to by a single term when the speaker is female and male respectively. In this case the sex of the brother's and sister's children are not taken into consideration.

4. Husbands brothers and sisters are only distinguished by age. Their sex is ignored. Wife's brothers are not distinguished by age, but wife's sisters are always distinguished according to age.

The Dimasa kinship terminology, according to the classification of Lowie and Kirchhoff, marks both collaterality and bifurcation. Accordingly, Mo, MoSi, and FaSi have different terms. Similarly Mo, FaBrWi, and MoBrWi have separate terms. In the same way Si, MoSiDa, and MoBrDa have distinct terms, so also the case with Da, and BrDa.

Sibling terms are never applied to the cousins. All cousin



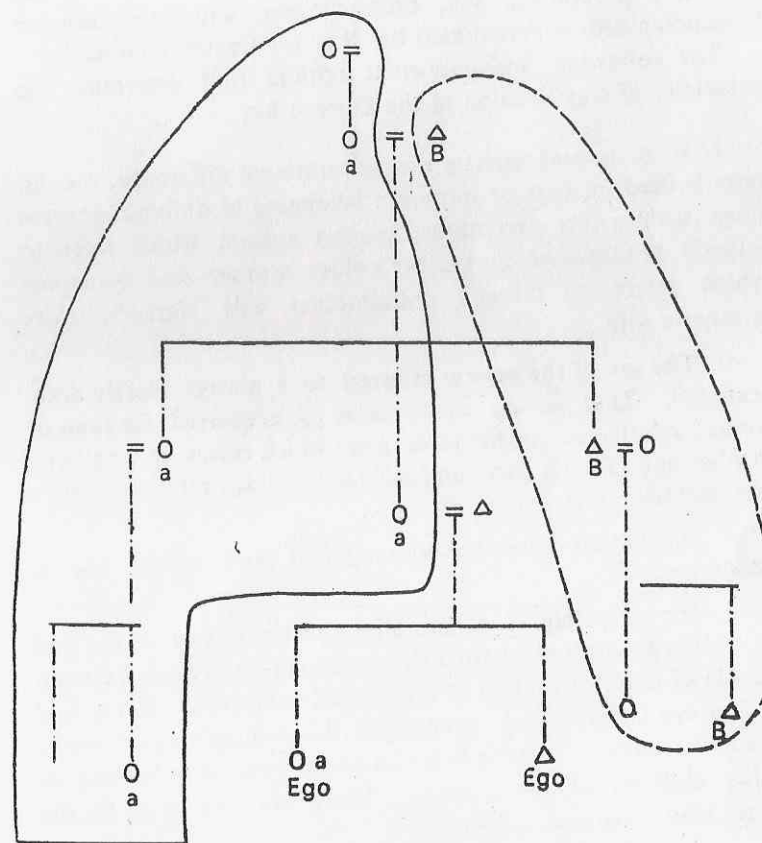
terms whether parallel or cross are descriptive in nature. It may be mentioned here that MoBr and FaSi are referred to by a single term *bede*. So their children are referred to as *bedeni-basa/bisik*. It also resembles Iroquois terminology where FaSi-Da, Mo and BrDa are called by the same term but are differentiated from parallel cousins as well as from sisters. Incidentally this type of cousin terminology is often associated with matrilineal or double descent.

A sex-wise segregation is observed in Dimasa kinship terminology. The case of sister's children has already been described. In a similar way, wife's sisters are distinguished according to age while wife's brothers are not. A man can remarry his deceased wife's younger sister but never the elder sister. If he marries a woman whose matriclan differs from that of his first wife, the daughter born of the first wife must have to be sheltered by his previous wife's sister. In case of husband's brothers and sisters the kinship terminology follows the ordinary rule which establishes a relationship of avoidance with the elders and extends joking relationship with the younger. Hence there are only two terms for elder and younger sibling of husband, irrespective of their sex.

#### BEHAVIOUR OF THE KIN

Kinship terms though often used for linguistic analysis, have got important social implications as well. As it can be observed among the Dimasa, a single term is used to refer to a number of kin, e.g. *boai*, *bobrauling*, *bede*. The term *boai* refers to husband's elder brothers, wife's elder sister, and younger sister's husband (woman speaking). Socially, they stand in the same parlour of avoidance. On the other hand the term *bobrauling* is a joking term which is applied to husband's younger brother and sister, wife's younger brother and sister, and husband's sister's husband. The common term *bede* is applied to father's sister and mother's brother's wife, suggesting the possibility of cross cousin marriage in the society. This is also suggested by another term of address *agmi* which is used to indicate son's wife's father and daughter's husband's father. But this term is meant for the persons who are standing in brother-in-law relationship. Generally, mother's

CHART 5  
KINSHIP TYPE





brother and father-in-law are addressed as *brao*. There is no separate term for stepfather and step mother. They are addressed as *adi* (FayoBr) and *mousi* (MoyoSi) respectively. This suggests possible relationship of levirate and sororate. In practice, both the systems are prevalent in the society though their occurrence is rare.

In order to have a clear idea of the pattern, of kinship behaviour it will be useful, first of all, to understand the different sets of kin, which are affected by the descent system. As stated earlier, a man has double clan allegiance. So equal importance is put both to patrilineal and matrilineal kin. There is again subdivision in the matrilineal kin, the female kin of mother's matriclan (*jaddi*) and the male kin of mother's patriclan (*sengsong*). This is shown in Chart 5.

Mother's female kin are always over emphasised and it covers a greater range (shown by the solid line) than that of mother's paternal kin (shown by broken line). The ego must avoid the mother's matriclan in marriage and treat them almost as consanguinal kin. On the other hand, the relation of ego to his/her mother's patrikin is very much circumscribed to the immediate kin only, namely, mother's father and their children. The ego can treat them as marriageable affines as cross-cousin marriage is permissible in the society. If the ego is male, such relationship with the mother's patrikin is, however, considered as incestuous.

There is apparently very little scope of privileges and obligations in case of mother's patrikin, which are restricted to MoBr only. But duties and obligations towards the mother's patrikin stretches far beyond. A girl or a boy has a very close relationship with his or her MoSi and she is treated like a mother. A woman cannot live with any woman other than her own matriclan. For that reason a woman maintains close association with her mother's house, even after marriage. Occasionally, it is noticed that on divorce or widowhood, a woman returns to her mother's house. An orphan boy is usually looked after by the mother's mother but never by father's mother who belongs to a different matriclan. A woman is indifferent of her son's son but is always careful of daughter's son or daughter, specially of a daughter.

Mother's brother is treated as an ordinary kin. He has no special function as the society emphasises patrilineal relationship. A man has very little connection with his mother's brother's patriclan. As sex dichotomy is pronounced in the Dimasa social structure and kinship system, a man's relationship with his mother's patrilineal kin has very little importance.

Among the consanguinal kin the relationships within the nuclear family have already been discussed. There are some important relations outside the nuclear family as well. They are grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, etc. The relationship between the grandparents and grandchildren is of respect and affection. Generally a man has no economic relationship with either his grandparents or his grandchildren. But there exists certain social obligations. During marriage or social ceremony grandparents are called for. It has been observed that maternal grandparents were more intimate with grandchildren than the paternal grandparents among the Dimasa. The relation with the father's kin and mother's kin become important if they live in the same locality. Thus residential groups form more close units than the relatives of different localities. Of course in a particular village or hamlet all the households are more or less related to one another one way or the other and members cooperate on festive occasions. Men and women of the local group belonging to same clan are treated as consanguinal kin.

In Dimasa society the importance of affinal kin is almost as important as that of the consanguinal kin. A Dimasa man develops close relationship with his affinal kin as it is their custom to live in the wife's house for one year just after marriage. During that period he becomes intimate with the affinal group and often it has been found that the Dimasa men got settled in their wife's village. The relationship between the son-in-law and mother-in-law has already been discussed in connection with the discussion on family. It may be added here that though the daughter-in-law is socially equated to a daughter, she is addressed somewhat differently using the term *rao* as suffix. The Dimasa society, however, does not demand any obligation from her towards her parents-in-law. The



relationship between the members like SoWiFa and DaHuFa is very cordial.

The affinal kin are always called for on any festive occasions and they also equally cooperate in this respect.

#### NOTES

1. Murdock, G.P. "Double Descent", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Part-1, 1940, pp. 555-561.
2. Emeneau T.B. "Toda marriage Regulations and Taboos", *American Anthropologists*, 39:103-112.

### 3

## The Dimasa Economy

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Dimasa economic life. For their subsistence, however, they mainly depend on shifting cultivation locally known as *jhum*. As the people live in the hills and land is available in abundance in the vicinity of every settlement, it has become possible for the Dimasa to practise this type of cultivation. The income derived from shifting cultivation however, barely meets the requirement of the people. As Pakyntein observes: "Economically the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District is very poor. The reasons for this economic backwardness are varied and manifold. As in the case with all hill areas, the problem of communication and transport which is the life line of the people present the greatest difficulty. Perhaps next to the Mizo District, this district is the most backward in respect of road communications. A host of villages living scattered about in the district, remain in isolation and are far away from any highway or railway station. Most of them are inaccessible and the people have to tread hard through dense forests and jungles to sell their produce, footpaths or bridle paths being the only means of communication. Next comes the age-old practice of *jhum* cultivation which is a scourge to the people. The impact of such a system of agriculture on the economy of the people has no doubt been harmful in the sense that not only has such a system been responsible for developing a nomadic tendency in the people, but it has also denuded the district of its forests wealth and given rise to other disastrous consequences like soil erosion, silting up of navigable rivers and floods in the plains.



Indiscriminate destruction of forests cause the soil to be washed away by the rains, adversely affected the fertility of the area and eventually lead to conditions of acute food scarcity.<sup>1</sup>

#### LAND TENURE AND TYPES OF LAND

The autonomous hill districts of Assam have no special land and revenue system for the tribals. In respect of land tenure the district authorities are guided by The Assam Code<sup>2</sup> according to which permanent ownership of land is not possible. Land may, however, be owned for cultivation on annual or periodical lease extending upto a maximum period of thirty years. On annual lease one has only usufructuary rights allowed by the Assam Code. In the case of periodical lease, however, all rights under the tenancy act can be enjoyed.<sup>3</sup>

The villages including their respective agricultural fields have their boundaries demarcated by the district council. As the fields demarcated for agricultural purposes are mostly covered by jungles, the villagers do not usually cultivate contiguous plots. According to need and choice, every head of the households of the village select different plots of land for cultivation. Ordinarily they do not select virgin forests for agricultural purposes as it requires a huge amount of labour for cleaning jungles and making fields arable. They, rather, clear "unclassed state forests," the big trees of which have already been cut by the forest department of the State government of Assam, and cultivate them.

The land of a Dimasa village can be divided into three types. These are the *jhum* land (*hagong*), dry land and wet land. The *jhum* lands are those where slash and burn methods of cultivation are practised. Usually after clearing the jungles and bushes the trees and shrubs are let dry and burnt. The ashes of these are used as manure of the *jhum* fields. The cultivators do not make any effort to develop the *jhum* fields and bring them under permanent cultivation. As a result, this type of cultivation is not possible in the same field year after year. So the Dimasa, with the passage of time, select different plots of land for this type of cultivation.

The dry fields are used primarily for the cultivation of mustard seeds. Unlike *jhum* fields the dry land can be

cultivated for consecutive years. Naturally, the ownership of this type of land is more or less permanent.<sup>4</sup> The dry lands are usually situated on the plains whereas the *jhum* lands are situated on small hills. There is no facility for irrigation water on the dry fields. Ordinarily, the high river banks are used by the Dimasa as dry fields.

The wet lands are used for the cultivation of paddy. The ownership of the wet lands is also permanent. In Mikir Hills there is practically no wet land. In the North Cachar Hills also the amount of available wet land is scarce. The wet lands are taxable, the *jhum* lands and the dry lands are tax free.

In many tribal areas, specially in *jhum* practising areas, generally, a certain amount of land is held in common by an entire village. The villagers with the consent of the village council can raise their crops on such lands. In the areas where the Dimasa live, the system is slightly different. As ample tax-free land is available in the vicinity, individual farmers can cultivate any amount of land without prior permission of the village council. Lands of individual farmers are demarcated either by natural landmarks or by placing two wooden sticks crosswise at each corner of the field.<sup>5</sup> When a particular plot of land is selected by someone and thus demarcated none else tries to encroach upon it even if it is left fallow for several years.

The cultivation of *jhum* fields requires proportionately a greater amount of manpower and cooperative efforts than cultivation of wet fields. In spite of that joint or cooperative farming receive very little attention from the Dimasa.<sup>6</sup> This is because the Dimasa society is too much family-oriented and that too again is structurally circumscribed. However, the idea of joint farming is not known to the Dimasa. When a new village is established joint cultivation for the first few (one or two) years is observed. During my stay in Hajadisa village eleven families migrated from there to Diyung valley to establish a new settlement. Initially the migrants practised joint farming with utmost effort and showed a very high degree of cooperation until all of them could get established there. The jointly cultivated fields are called *fatain hakhaw*. These are



usually divided into several large plots varying from one to five acres in size. These are locally called *fatain hari*.

#### AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES ROUND THE YEAR

The Dimasa have three major seasons, viz. winter, summer and rain in a year. The autumn and spring make sudden and shortlived appearances for a month or so, between the rain and winter and between the winter and summer seasons respectively. The cultivation of summer crop is the most important in this region. In winter there is a dearth of irrigation water in this area. Naturally, the Dimasa cannot grow winter crops in the high lands.

The agricultural activities of the Dimasa are largely regulated by the seasonal cycle. The cultivation of paddy and other agrarian activities are mostly undertaken in the rainy season. The cultivable area is largely devoted to the production of paddy, cotton, mustard, and sesame. It may be noted here that vegetables, that fetch a good income of cash money are raised in the same field along with other crops. A whole plot is seldom devoted to the cultivation of vegetables and for the cultivation of banana; the common practice is to grow vegetables along the fringe of cultivated fields or near the homesteads. Small quantities of maize, used for domestic consumption, are also grown along the fringe of paddy fields.

The agricultural operations of the Dimasa start from clearing up of forests that begins in the winter and is continued through summer. The actual cultivation of crops takes place during the period from June to October. Table 13 gives details of the Dimasa agricultural operations and the calendrical cycle followed by them.

From Table 13 it becomes clear that a large portion of time and labour of the Dimasa are spent on preparation of the *jhum* field. For three or four months of the year, starting from December up to February, they remain busy in cutting jungles of the selected hill tracts and then spend two other months for burning the cut down trees and shrubs. Suitable cultivable lands are searched for during the winter season and the lands are made ready for sowing during summer. This lengthy and sometimes tedious operation necessarily calls for

TABLE 13

#### Agricultural Activities Round the Year

Lunar month	Calendar month	Season	Agricultural activities
<i>Phalgun</i>	Dec.-Jan.	Winter	Threshing of paddy, cutting of jungle for <i>jhum</i> cultivation.
<i>Chaitri</i>	Jan.-Feb.	Winter	Cutting of Jungle.
<i>Baisakhi</i>	Feb.-Mar.	Winter	Burning of Jungle.
<i>Jaiti</i>	Mar.-Apr.	Summer	Burning of Jungle.
<i>Asadi</i>	Apr.-May	Summer	Clearing up of un-burnt residue.
<i>Sadho</i>	May.-Jun.	Summer	Sowing of the <i>jhum</i> field.
<i>Bhāiao</i>	Jun.-Jul.	Rain	Weeding
<i>Aswin</i>	Jul.-Aug.	Rain	Preparation of land for transplantation of paddy, sowing of cotton seeds and harvesting of <i>aus</i> paddy
<i>Kartick</i>	Aug.-Sept.	Rain	Ploughing and transplantation
<i>Agāan</i>	Sept.-Oct.	Rain	Weeding of paddy field and cotton field
<i>Pōas</i>	Oct.-Nov.	Autum	Harvesting
<i>Māgh</i>	Nov.-Dec.	Winter	Harvesting of paddy and threshing and plucking of cotton

intensive labour utilisation, the appropriate knowledge of which the Dimasa often lack. This results sometimes in unavoidable wastage.

As stated earlier several years of continuous *jhum* cultivation exhausts the fertility of the field and it becomes fit for re-cultivation of cereals only after a gap of ten or twelve years. Such fields are ordinarily used for the cultivation of plantain only. In the mustard fields, however, the cultivation is more or less permanent and the fields under sesame cultivation are



left fallow for only one year.

The method of cultivation of the Dimasa is technologically very crude and primitive. They have only a few agricultural implements, viz. *sishong* (billhook), *sungh* (sickle), *sunghisa* (small sickle), *khudisa* (small spade) and *khudicong* (large spade). These are mainly used in *jhum* and dry field. For cultivation of wet fields the Dimasa depend on these implements with an addition of a very crude type of plough. For clearing forests billhook and axe are used. This job is done

TABLE 14

## Agricultural Produce Round the Year

Name of the crops	Sowing period	Harvesting period	Remarks
Maize	Apr.-May	Jun.-Jul.	Not used as cash crop. Used for household consumption during scarcity of rice
Sweet gourd, bean, ladies finger	Apr.-May	Jun.-Jul.	Sold in the market for cash
Paddy ( <i>Aus</i> )	Apr.-May	Jul.-Aug.	Supply provision for three months (Jul.-Sept.)
Brinjal	Apr.-Jun	Jul.-Oct.	Sold in the market for cash
Banana	Jun.-Jul.	Nov.-Dec.	--do--
Paddy ( <i>Aman</i> )	Jul.-Aug.	Oct.-Nov.	Supply provision for five months (Oct.-Feb.)
Sesame	Jul.-Aug.	Oct.-Nov.	Sold in the market for cash during lean period (Mar.-Jun) and used for buying rice
Cotton	Jul.-Aug.	Nov.-Dec.	--do--
Chilli	Jul.-Aug.	Nov.-Dec.	--do--
Mustard	Oct.-Nov	Jan.-Feb.	--do--

exclusively by the malefolk. The seeds are sown into the soil with the help of a small spade. This is followed by the weeding operation by means of billhook. Weeding is done by members of either sex. Harvesting is done with the help of sickles and in this operation also services of both men and women are employed.

Table 14 gives some idea of the agricultural produce of the Dimasa and their pattern of disposal. As the Table indicates, paddy and maize constitute the major food crops for them. Vegetables of various kinds, viz. pepper, bottle-gourd, pumpkin, brinjal, and beans are grown along with cotton. Fruits like watermelon and banana are very popular and are grown abundantly by them. The former is grown along with other vegetables. The Dimasa usually do not sell paddy or maize for cash return. Oil-seeds, cotton, and spices are not sold either for any cash return unless they are forced by circumstances to sell them. Only the vegetables and fruits constitute the major cash crops of the Dimasa.

The Dimasa lack appropriate knowledge of modern plant protection measures. They are, however, very much concerned about it and try their own way in order to secure a sure harvest. For the protection of crops and a good harvest, the Dimasa observe several pre- and post-cultivation ceremonies. These are generally held collectively by the villagers. The more important of them are *Hajagerba*, *Kharamphanggerba* and *Maislaigerba*. *Hajagerba* is held one day before sowing. It is observed during day time for propitiating the spirits of the jungles. As the villages and agricultural fields are situated in jungles the Dimasa seek cooperation of spirits of the jungles for protection of crop. The agricultural fields are often situated far away from the village site. Naturally, it is not possible to watch them regularly. Under these circumstances the Dimasa have no alternative but to depend on the spirits for the protection of their crops. *Maislaigerba*, i.e. worship of the deity of paddy is observed during weeding. Each villager collects some leaves of paddy and gather in a common place in the jungle and then the deity of paddy is propitiated by sacrificing hen and egg. All the expenses of these observances are borne by the villagers collectively. Besides these, individual



farmers also offer worship to different deities during various agricultural operations to ensure bumper crops. After harvest, however, the first rice is offered to the ancestral deity.

#### ORGANISATION OF LABOUR

Self-sufficiency in labour supply is the characteristic feature of every Dimasa village. As family is the principal productive unit, it is also the sole source for labour supply. No kingroup, generally speaking, extends help in agrarian activities across the family. All the members of a particular family, both male and female, execute various agricultural operations themselves. Families having no adult male member, however, engage labour for such work as it is too strenuous to be performed by women either on cash payment or on the clear understanding of reciprocal exchange of labour, locally known as *haroamanoba*. This arrangement of mutual exchange of labour, however, does not hold good in case of a family consisting of only old men and women or minor children. In such cases labour is hired for hard jobs like cutting big trees at a piece rate system or on a contract basis. One Khamjairung of Throkalamghkher village was found to take recourse to this system. She was a widow with minor children. Her sons were too young to be able to cut down the trees and clearing up jungles. She, therefore, employed some youngmen of the village against cash considerations.

It may be noted here that the Dimasa system of hiring labourers is strictly restricted within their own community and preference is given to the members of the same village. This is to provide jobs to such people of the village or the community who are incapable of following the agricultural pursuit independently. It may be worthwhile saying a few words about the Dimasa concept of hired labour here which is primarily based on egalitarianism. Hiring of labourers is not uncommon in the society but a labourer is never treated as a servant. A hired labourer is regarded as one of the members of the family. Ownership or possession of wealth as such do not create any conflict or distance between the employer and the employee. Naturally, one cannot be regarded higher in the society just by virtue of one's possession of wealth.

Extremely poor people, specially the helpless old widows or unmarried girls cannot engage any labourer. Young unmarried girls though sometimes get their jobs done by reciprocal exchange of labour the old always adopt the *biba* system for their sustenance. *Biba* means prayer, i.e. prayer to the village headman for help in agricultural operations. On the advice of the headman, all the young members of a village work a full day once for cutting the jungle and once again for sowing the seeds. No payment, either in cash or kind is made for this service. The youth are, however, treated in a feast given after the harvest. Though the *biba* is an acknowledged system of the society, a negative feeling is associated with this gratis labour system. As a result, people take as less advantage of this system as possible. In the village of Throkalamghkher, Resoma, a very old widow, lived with her daughter's daughter who was also too young to perform any hard agricultural job. In the year 1963 the village youth, following instructions of the village headman, cultivated one acre of land for their help and the entire amount of crop was given to them.

In addition to *biba*, there is another system of economic cooperation among the Dimasa. This is based on mutual understanding. According to this system a group of people organise an informal cooperative unit and supply necessary labour to constituent members on demand. This system is locally known as *yaowaithaiiba*. Such a unit was formed by four members of Hajadisa village in 1964 for cultivation of cotton and repairing of houses of the constituent members. Such a unit facilitates the work of the Dimasa in remote jungles and helps them to take up heavy jobs that involve a large number of labourers. This principle of cooperation becomes more strict and formalised in what is called *habowaragaidangba*. Under this system, each member has to perform a fixed quota of job on a fixed amount of land. Size of the land to be worked on must be equal for all members. Every member of the cooperative, in turn, works on the land of other members. This rigidity of terms and conditions made this system somewhat popular among the Dimasa.

Despite the existence of various systems of cooperation among the Dimasa, as stated earlier, every individual family is



more inclined to follow the traditional principle of answering every agrarian problem by the family members only. Amongst the Dimasa the members of the age-group of 15 through 60 constitute the labour force of the society. Every family trains its adolescent members in agricultural activities before they join the labour force. Boys start working as apprentices when they are about 12 or 13 years old. Those who are above 60 years of age are considered retired labourers. Only under unavoidable circumstances do they work as labourers; but temporarily. As old age infirmity is not insured by any family or social system whatsoever, aged people cannot always avoid working in the labour force. Adolescents, however, are not included in the labour force. They are, counted as auxiliary working force as they sometimes extend their services as helpers to the regular labour force. They extend their labour if and when they are warranted by circumstances to do that.

Dignity of labour in the Dimasa society is highly esteemed. Begging or receiving gratis or help from others in any form is considered derogatory. Inactive and indolent persons, though somehow tolerated for the sake of group and social solidarity, are looked down upon with pity and contempt. In the *jhum* field the major work is done by men. If the fields are close to the village site women also help men in all agricultural operations, except ploughing. In the mustard fields, however, most of the agricultural activities are done by women as very little amount of physical labour is required for such a job. In wet lands, however, where ploughing is the main job, men do most of the work.

#### PRODUCTION PATTERN

Though cultivation of paddy is the principal agrarian activity in Mikir Hills, rice because of its poor return, cannot meet their requirements round the year. Meagre rainfall in this area is to some extent responsible for that. The area is, however, suitable for the cultivation of cotton, mustard, and sesame and the Dimasa produce them in order to supplement the deficit of paddy and earn cash. The cultivation of cash crops is profiteering though the innate tendency of the people is to produce more paddy, in spite of the knowledge that the cultivation of paddy

requires more land and labour and the return is comparatively low. As the rice forms the principal staple food of the Dimasa they are eager to be as much independent in rice production as possible. Villages in the North Cachar Hills are mostly self-sufficient in food production. In the Mikir Hills on the other hand, there is hardly any village that is self-sufficient in this respect.

The rate of production of the Dimasas, rather, unrelated to the demand of the local market. There is no formal or informal council in the village that is empowered to decide what crops are to be cultivated in how many acres of land. Individual farmers take their own decision in this regard. Naturally there is hardly any relationship between the local demand and the rate of production. As the people are primarily concerned about the production of their own requirements, except a few entrepreneurs the Dimasa are unaware of the market demand. Though they visit the market regularly, the principle of 'market' does not influence their economy.

#### OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME

Besides agriculture, food gathering, fishing, and hunting form part of the Dimasa economy though their respective contributions are rather humble. Some non-agricultural practices like collection of forest products, raising the cattle, pig, and poultry birds, spinning, weaving and practising of sericulture are also found among the Dimasa. The return they obtain from these supplements the income derived from agriculture.

The women collect vegetables and catch fish for everyday requirement. For fishing different types of fishing baskets are used. The Dimasa also catch fish by applying poison in running water. Collective fishing is also sometimes organised by them and the village as a whole participates in such expeditions. The total exploit is shared by all the villagers equally and members of both sexes take part in collective fishing.

Hunting is out and out a masculine job and the successful hunters are highly esteemed in the society. The hunting expedition is launched individually. The traditional hunting weapons are spear and pellet bow. But nowadays guns have become more popular as hunting weapons. The common games



are deer, wild pigs, wild fowls, and other birds. The meat of the game is consumed by the hunter and his family. It is not customary to distribute meat to the relatives or neighbours. They can, however, buy meat from the hunter. Surplus meat is sometimes taken to the market for sale. If the local market is not within a radius of seven or eight kilometres the surplus meat is smoked and preserved. The hunter's immediate kin sometimes get a small share from the surplus meat. But this is not obligatory nor is there any proportion fixed of such a share.

The collection of honey is also one of the important economic activities of the Dimasa. The collection of honey is also a man's job. Men go to deep forests, sometimes individually and sometimes in groups to collect honey. In this respect co-operation beyond the bounds of family unit is needed and often extended. It has been observed that affinal kin, mostly the wife's brother, extend help. Consanguinal kin seldom come forward to help. Collected honey is distributed equally among the participants. The Dimasa usually do not consume honey. The common practice is to sell it to the government recognised dealers. The larvae of the honey bees, however, form a delicacy of the Dimasa dishes and they consume them with great pleasure.

In addition to the above the Dimasa explore the forests for other purposes as well. Firewood which is the major forest product in the domestic sphere is collected from the nearby forests. The house building materials such as wood, bamboo and thatching grass are also collected from the adjacent forests. In remote villages like Semkhor, banana leaves which are used as plates are also collected from the forest.

It has already been said that the Dimasa dispose off the major share of cash crops and vegetables for money and thus they make up deficit of food supply as this extra money enables them to buy foodgrains from the market. Rice being the staple food most of their cash income is spent on rice. Besides rice, they also buy other necessary articles of daily use, like, salt, tea, molasses, kerosene oil, soap, narcotics and safety matches from the market. They also sell mustard seeds and unprocessed cotton and buy mustard oil and cotton thread. Spinning does not get much encouragement among them as

yarn for weaving is available at a cheaper rate in the market and sale of cotton, on the contrary, brings a better return.

#### INDEBTEDNESS

Though the Dimasa live in a very isolated setting they are not exempted from the clutches of market economy as they are also directly related to cash economy and are thus exposed to the moneylenders, locally known as *mahajan*. These *mahajans* are mostly big merchants of the local markets to whom they dispose of their commercial crops like cotton, mustard and honey. They are used to borrowing money from them to meet the cost of cultivation and other needs. Having left with no other alternative to repay the debt they sell their agricultural and forest products to the moneylenders. This is an age-old relationship between the Dimasa and the moneylenders. Though the Dimasa could get more money by selling their products in the market they don't do that as this may strain their relationship with the moneylenders.

The ambition of the Dimasa in general is limited to the satisfaction of the immediate needs. When these are served with and transactions with the moneylenders are over, the people of the North Cachar Hills indulge in spending a large share of their produce during the annual feast of the harvest festival. The villages of Mikir Hills owing to their poor rice yield cannot afford the observance of this feast. As lavish and generous spending raise one's status in the society, a major amount of money and other agricultural products are spent on observing the rituals. Though some amount of their income is preserved in the form of family jewellery these are also often used as security for getting loans.

Sometimes, to make their two ends meet the Dimasa take recourse to an ambivalent avenue of borrowing money. In the villages of Throkalongkher and Seingyunpur the practice of indebtedness is widespread. The former village with an incredible number of widows has only a few hands to earn. The latter village with hard soil has low productivity. Naturally, for any additional expenditure for marriage, festivals, feasts, and similar other occasions they let themselves become an easy prey



in the hands of the local moneylenders who demand a very high rate of interest. In the area of district council the business of moneylending is legally prohibited. In spite of that the underground business is going unchecked. There is an unwritten contract between the debtor and the creditor to sell the agricultural produce to the latter just after harvest.

The rich co-villagers sometimes lend paddy to the poor without interest. This practice is rare though not wholly unknown. It is known as *maislaoba*. *Rangdon* a special basket is used as the unit of measurement for this purpose. One *rangdon* contains roughly 5 *seers* of paddy and a single *rangdon* is used for the purpose of similar transactions of the whole village. After use it is kept in the custody of the headman. As there is surplus in the North Cachar Hills this practice is prevalent there. In Mikir Hills the rich co-villagers lend money and later on realise this loan by employing the debtor for agricultural jobs.

The Dimasa do not carry over debts through years or generations. They are very much keen to repay the debts because for them all human relationships are based on trust. The debt of slack period is immediately followed by repayment after the harvest. There is no written agreement between the debtor and creditor for extending a loan. Very rarely they change their merchants. The exploitation in this regard by the merchants is not very far-stretching as the Dimasa virtually possess no immovable property to be mortgaged.

#### ROLE OF MARKET

The economy of a Dimasa village, as already indicated, is not self-sufficient. Because of their partial dependence on cash crops they are rather compelled to establish economic relationship with other communities. This is mostly held through market transactions. Deficit of rice production and necessities for other articles force the Dimasa to procure them from the market by disposing of their cash earning. Naturally, they maintain a close contact with the market that is generally found situated at a distance of 7-8 kms. or less. In North Cachar Hills, markets are held on a fixed day, every week. There are seven markets for 200 villages. Thus the surrounding villagers

can attend any market according to their convenience. The markets that are situated nearby are visited by the Dimasa regularly.

Contact with the market has badly affected the weaving industry of the Dimasa. Formerly, they used to weave their own cloth. But as the cost of handloom or mill made articles is less than their own products the Dimasa do not bother much for the indigenous industry. Naturally, weaving is losing importance among them. The weaving of the Dimasa now takes care only of the female garments. This is specially the case in the area of the Mikir Hills. The inhabitants of Hajadisa or Throkalangkhher enjoy the facilities of daily market of Lumding. They attend the market twice a week. Women come to the market in groups while men come individually. Everybody carries a basket full of articles on their backs hung by tump-line from the forehead.

As far as the vegetables are concerned the market transactions are mostly held between the Dimasa and the Bengalee wholesale dealers. The commercial crops, however, are disposed of to the Marwari merchants. Though through market relationship the Dimasa develop friendship with the outsiders, they are too conservative to invite any outsiders during any social or ritual affairs. In addition to the Bengalee and the Marwari the Dimasa have monetary relationship with the blacksmiths and the goldsmiths of the market as well. They buy agricultural iron implements and ornaments from the market and thus come in contact with their makers. In such transactions the terms are always cash.

Almost every Dimasa man has got preliminary knowledge of carpentry and the wooden portion of their agricultural implements are prepared by themselves. Almost in every village a self-styled Dimasa carpenter is found, who attained sufficient skill in carpentry by virtue of his own effort, and he supplies the necessary articles to his village and the neighbouring villages. Here also the transactions are made in cash terms. Some of the Dimasa attain proficiency in basketry as well, and sometimes they also sell their products in the market.

Economic problems made the Dimasa dependent on the market and thus gradually pushed them towards a larger



economy without their knowing its implications and principle. The market has a very much peripheral effect of the Dimasa economy. This initial contact with large economy is not always harmless to the Dimasa as it often effects their tribal solidarity considerably. However, a market, apart from its economic aspects, is an essential institution to the Dimasa. It is the main outlet and the information centre to them. Here they get news about the outside world. The reflection of this exposure to this outer world is quite perceptible in the world-view of the Dimasa.

In summing up it can be said that the condition of the Dimasa may be a bit better than the ordinary Indian peasantry but their standard of living is not at all satisfactory. Too often the villagers are badly in debt. The reasons for their low agricultural productivity can be attributed to the hardness of soil, inefficient techniques of production, lack of knowledge about organised agricultural behaviour and above all, low investment of capital. The traditional economic habits of the Dimasa and their social system do not provide an incentive towards economic betterment. Further, as nature in the Dimasa philosophy is more powerful than man, it is something to be adjusted to rather than controlled. As a result, there is hardly any urge towards economic betterment among the Dimasa.

#### NOTES

1. Pakyntein, "District Census Handbook: United Mikir and North Cachar Hill," *Census of India, 1961*, Gauhati, Assam, Vol. III p. 22.
2. *The Assam Code 1939*, Vol. I, Assam Government Press, 1940, p. 200.
3. *ibid.*, p. 199.
4. As stated earlier the cultivators have usufructuary rights over the plots of land they cultivate. According to Dimasa custom if someone demarcates a plot of land for cultivation no one else ever puts any claim over that plot. Naturally, a Dimasa who cultivates a particular

plot of land for years together, for all practical purposes the plot of land becomes his own.

5. This method of marking the land is locally known as *daupher*.
6. An exception of this is found in the system of *yaowathailaiba* and *habowaragaiklangba*. Details of it will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

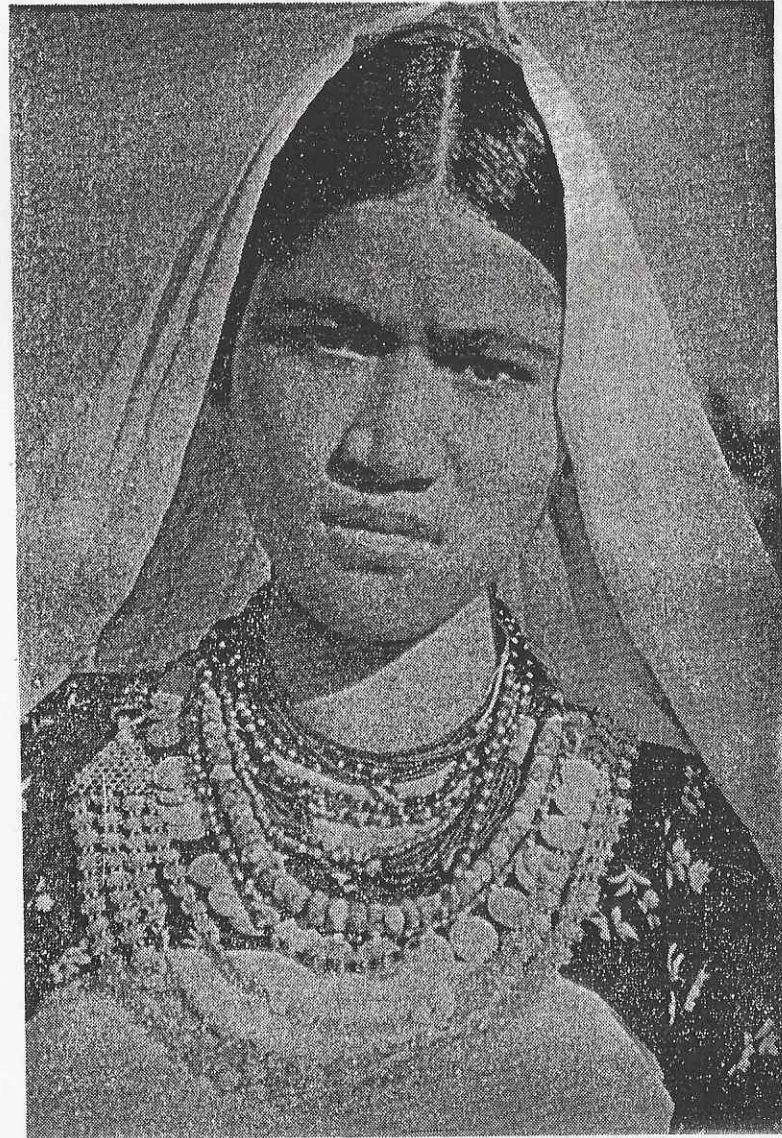


## On Polity

The Dimasa political organisation is a three-tier system with the Autonomous District Council at the top, the Mouzadar in the middle, and the village council at the bottom. Though the traditional authority structure of a Dimasa village is very highly segmented, it has been mostly reshaped after the formation of Autonomous District Councils.

According to provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India a number of autonomous hill districts have been created. The Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills are such autonomous hills districts. Administratively, these two autonomous hill districts have been united together to form the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. At present these two autonomous districts, viz. the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills are two subdivisions of the administrative district United Mikir and North Cachar Hills with their headquarters at Diphu and Haflong respectively. According to the provisions of the Constitution of India the administrative district has two Regional Councils, one each for each of its subdivisions. They are known as Mikir Hills District Council and North Cachar Hills District Council. They have wide legislative and executive powers on matters as specified in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The organisational set up, power and functions of the autonomous district councils are as follows :

“The District Council consists of sixteen members, twelve of them elected on the basis of adult suffrage, and four persons nominated by Government. The nominations were made in



A DIMASA BELLE WITH HER TRADITIONAL ORNAMENTS



Each district council has divided its area into a number of *mouzas*. Each *mouza* includes a number of villages. A *mouzadar*, selected by the district council, is incharge of each *mouza*. The villages in their turn are administered by headman. A *mouzadar* is directly responsible for collection of revenue from his *mouza*. He usually delegates his responsibility to the headmen of the respective villages who collect revenue and deposit the amount to the *mouzadar*.

It has already been indicated that the Dimasa villages are linked with the regional or district council. Each village has also its own political organisation. The traditional Dimasa political structure is very elaborate and the system is based on democratic principle. The elaborate traditional political structure is at present seldom found. But the three seniormost positions of the original power structure has been retained everywhere. These are *khunang*, *dilek*, and *habaisagao*.

Among the Dimasa, the village headman is known as *khunang*. Nowadays they quite often use the Assamese word *gaonbura* to refer to a headman. Formerly, *khunang* was an ascribed position. The oldest member of the village by virtue of his seniority, would occupy this position. At present the *khunang* is an elected officer voted by the adult male members of the village. The other two positions of *dilek* and *habaisagao* are also filled up by election among the adult male villagers. Formerly these two positions were also ascribed and would be occupied on the basis of seniority. The *dilek* acts as an assistant headman of the village and the *habaisagao* is the revenue collector. Usually a *khunang* is assisted by one *dilek*. In some villages more than one *dilek* are also found.

#### TRADITIONAL VILLAGE ORGANISATION

The Dimasa village organisation have mainly two functions, executive and judiciary. The executive functions are related to development work or organising anything for community interest. Judiciary functions take care of the maintenance of law and order in the village. The traditional type of village organisation has now become obsolete except in Semkhor, the oldest and most conservative Dimasa village. The following

different kinds of officers are holding various positions in the power structure of that village.

TABLE 15  
Political Structure

Designation of Officers	Number of Positions
<i>Khunang or gaonbura</i>	1
<i>Dilek or assistant gaonbura</i>	1
<i>Daulathu</i>	15
<i>Habaisagao</i>	2
<i>Pharai</i>	2
<i>Mantri</i>	8
<i>Hangseobukhu</i>	25
<i>Jalairao</i>	Unlimited

Though all the above positions are not found in every Dimasa village in the villages of Mikir Hills there is another officer known as *sarkari gaonbura*. The Mikir Hills District Council has divided the villages into several groups. Each group includes eight to ten villages. A *sarkari gaonbura* is the spokesman of such a cluster of villages. The headmen of each group meet together and select one of them unanimously to act as a *sarkari gaonbura*. The formal approval of the district council is obtained subsequently on this election of *sarkari gaonbura*. Functionally he plays the role of an assistant to the *mouzadar*. For holding this position he is exempted from paying any house tax.

#### ELECTION OF THE VILLAGE OFFICIALS

##### *Khunang*

According to tradition the oldest member of the village becomes the *khunang*. No other qualification would be taken into account for filling this post. As it is an ascribed position occupied by the oldest man of the village his selection is unanimous. In Semkhor the *khunang* is one hundred years old



and is the seniormost member of the community. For the last four and a half years the present *khunang* is occupying this position. Before that he was a *dilek*, the second man in the Dimasa political hierarchy. At that time he was also the next to the seniormost member of the village. In Dimasa vocabulary the word *khunang* means one who speaks wisely.

At present seniority is not the only criterion for selection of *khunang*. The example at Semkhor is rather an exception than the norm in this respect. In most of the villages now he is elected by the adult male heads of the households. Usually, all the male heads of the village sit together, specially in the evening, after the day's work and discuss the election of *khunang*. A number of names are proposed for the post by different members of the community. One who secures the highest number of votes is declared elected. At present personal achievements and qualities are considered as important criteria for the selection of this post. Courage, strength, uprightness, nobility, intelligence and strong commonsense add to the qualifications of a candidate. Seniority is considered, though it is of secondary importance. Except in Semkhor in most of the Dimasa villages the *khunang* was found to be from the middle age-group (34-45 years). According to the present system none but the benevolent and active persons can be elected a *khunang*.

#### *Dilek*

Traditionally, next to the *khunang* in seniority of age would be the *dilek*. He is, in fact, the assistant *khunang* or headman. If the headman is too old to perform his duties the *dilek* shoulders his responsibilities. In Semkhor the *dilek* is 95 years old and he is next only to the headman in seniority of age. When the former *dilek* was promoted to headman four and a half years back the present *dilek* was promoted to this position from his previous position of *daulathu*. Except in Semkhor the system of election of *dilek* or assistant headman has also changed now. At present he is elected by the adult male heads of the village in an open election. The requisite qualifications as referred to in the case of headman are also counted as requisite qualifications for the assistant headman.

#### *Daulathu*

The position of *daulathu* has become obsolete in the present day Dimasa village council. Other than Semkhor the position is non-existent everywhere. According to traditional custom the position of a *daulathu* is occupied by a man who is third in the village according to seniority of age. When there is only one position for headman and one for assistant headman in every village the number of *daulathu* varies. In one village council there could be as many as 40 *daulathurao*.<sup>\*</sup> There is at least one *daulathu* in any village council. In Semkhor there are at present 15 *daulathurao*.

#### *Habaisagao*

According to traditional system the positions of *habaisagao* are filled up by people who are next to *daulathu* in seniority of age. The tenure of service of a *habaisagao* is not unlimited as in the case of headman or assistant headman or *daulathu*. Each *habaisagao* serves in his position for only two years. After that period he is promoted to *daulathu*. In Semkhor there are two *habaisagao*. One of them is senior and the other is junior. As the senior *habaisagao* is promoted every year, a new member is recruited as a junior *habaisagao* and the previous junior *habaisagao* is promoted to senior *habaisagao*. In other Dimasa villages the number of *habaisagao* is only one. The recent system of recruiting a *habaisagao* is by vote of the male heads of the households of the village.

#### *Pharai*

In the Dimasa village councils of today the position of *pharai* has become obsolete. Traditionally, in every village there were two *pharai*. At present the *pharai* are found functioning only at Semkhor. There are two *pharai* there. One of them is promoted to the position of *habaisagao* every year and a new member is recruited as *pharai*. The position of *pharai* is also filled up on the basis of seniority. A member who is next to *habaisagao* only in seniority of age is appointed as *pharai*. The tenure of service of a *pharai* is two years. Of the two *pharai* one is senior and the other is junior. The senior *pharai* is promoted to the position of *habaisagao*.

<sup>\*</sup>The plural form of *daulathu* is *daulathurao*.



*Mantri*

The position of *mantri* is also non-existent in the present Dimasa village councils except in Semkhor. There the *mantri* is selected in consideration of his merit, efficiency and wisdom by the headman, assistant headman, *daulathurao*, *habaisagao*, and *pharai*. The criterion of seniority is not taken into account in the selection of a *mantri*. Usually the *mantri* is from the young batch of villagers. Ordinarily there should be four *mantri* in every village. But at present there are eight *mantri* at Semkhor and this is the outcome of the village factionalism. As the village council could not come to a unanimous decision in the selection of *mantri*, in order to make a balance between the contesting candidates they had to select eight *mantri* at the time of the previous selection. Four of them belong to the Congress party and the other four are from the leftist supported Union party. The tenure of a *mantri* is four years. All the *mantri* are selected in the same year. So there is no distinction among the *mantri* on the basis of seniority or juniority.

*Hangseobukhu*

The *hangseobukhu* are assistants to the *mantri*. They are selected in two batches. In the first year of their selection the *khunang* and the *dilek* select a group of *hangseobukhu*. The next year this group of *hangseobukhu* select another batch of junior *hangseobukhu*. There are 25 *hangseobukhu* at Semkhor. In the first year of their election 12 *hangseobukhu* were selected. The rest were selected the next year. There is no limit to the tenure of service of the *hangseobukhu*.

*Jalairao*

This is the lowest rank in the Dimasa political structure. Any male member who is married, by virtue of his marital status, becomes a member of the *jalairao*. As all the married members of the village are *jalairao* there is no maximum or minimum limit to the number of positions.

The Dimasa village council is known as *kharaorao* (council of the village elders). From *khunang* upto *jalairao* all the village officials are members of this council. *Nagarao*, the unmarried Dimasa youth, do not belong to this council. They

have somewhat a lower status in the society. The only exception made to this rule is that some unmarried youth can be accepted as *mantri* and as *mantri* they can become members of the *kharaorao*.

## FUNCTIONS OF THE VILLAGE OFFICIALS

The authority structure of the Dimasa can broadly be divided into two groups. They are the senior group and the junior group. From *khunang* to *pharai* all the members of the village council form the senior group. The *mantri*, *hangseobukhu* and the *jalairao*, form the junior group. Traditionally, the senior groups are the recruiting authority of the junior group. The junior group, on the other hand has no say in the election of members of the senior group. The distinction between the senior group and the junior group is also observed in the Dimasa manner of serving food in a community feast. On such occasion the senior group is served food by the *pharai*. The junior group and the other members of the village are served food by the *nagarao*. The only exception to this rule is the case of the *mantri*. Though they belong to the junior group they are served food by the *pharai*. As the position of a *mantri* is highly responsible and very esteemed, the Dimasa honour them in this way.

*Khunang* is the most powerful man in the Dimasa political hierarchy. As the headman he commands respect and authority of the whole village. On behalf of the district council the headman is responsible for executing all government programmes in a village. He is entrusted with considerable executive, and judicial powers though in actual practice he can never be a despot. According to traditional system a headman had to discuss with the assistant headman and the *daulathurao* while taking any major decision. In judicial affairs, in addition to the above, the headman had to get confirmation of the *mantri* as well, as they are in practice the jury of the Dimasa village council. At present in Dimasa villages most of the traditional positions are lacking. So a headman for taking any major decision consults the village elders (*kharaorao*). The assistant headman assists the headman in every respect and the *habaisagao* helps him by collecting revenues, subscriptions for



community feasts and festivals etc. Like their predecessors the present day headmen cannot take any major decision by themselves. The village people are always consulted by them and in turn they cooperate with the headmen in every respect. The Dimasa society is mostly guided by tradition and customs. Naturally, there is very little scope for over-exerting the power of a headman. They seldom do anything that has no precedence. However, in case of any emergency if the situation demands him to put any injunction or impose any restriction the headman can do so.

As far as the judicial powers are concerned the headman settles all petty cases of theft, quarrels, adultery, divorce, etc., with the aid of the village elders. In Semkhor, where most of the things are still done according to the traditional pattern the headman consults the *daulathurao* in order to settle such cases. In case of any crime or breach of custom he is empowered to impose a fine, not exceeding Rs 50. He can also excommunicate a person who has committed some severe offence.

In addition to the above, a headman has the following responsibilities: collection of house tax,<sup>2</sup> collection of agricultural tax,<sup>3</sup> maintenance of birth and death register of the village population, maintenance of population register of the village, submission of annual census (in some detail) to the district council, maintenance of a special register for recording the incidence of unnatural death, maintenance of records of fire arms in the village, construction and maintenance of roads and public buildings, exchange of information with the *mouzaadar's* office and district council. Though a remarkable change is found in the election of a headman, functionally the position retains more or less the same power and the privileges as it traditionally had.

Though the function of assistant headman is to assist the headman in all his activities, in practice, he executes all development programmes on behalf of the headman. Being the second man in the Dimasa authority structure the assistant headman plays an important role in the selection of junior officials as well.

The other senior officials like *daulathu* help the headman in judicial affairs and in the selection of junior officials. Along

with the *mantri* they work as members of the village council. They all jointly fix the date of communal feasts and community festivals.

The next two senior groups are *habaisagao* and *pharai*. Among them only a *habaisagao* attends the meeting for the selection of *mantri*. Otherwise, their main function is the collection of revenue. Before communal worship they collect one seer of rice from every house and then request the *mantri* to fix the rate of subscription. Functionally, no change has been recorded in the activity of the *habaisagao*.

*Pharai* assists the *habaisagao* in collection of rice that will be necessary for some village festival. It is the duty of the *pharai* to serve the headman, assistant headman, *daulathurao*, *habaisagao* and *mantri* with banana leaves at the time of any communal feast. This symbolises the dignity of positions the individuals hold. At present no change has been recorded in the function of *habaisagao* either. The only exception is that formerly they had to consult the *mantri* for the fixation of subscription and now they consult the headman for this purpose.

The most important working officials are the *mantri*. Though they are junior in age they hold very responsible positions of jury in the village council. In regard to judicial function a headman cannot take any final decision without consultation with the *mantri*. When a case is referred to the district council the party involved has to take permission of the headman, assistant headman, *daulathurao*, and *mantri*. In case of any meeting regarding government affairs the *mantri* must have to attend it. This type of meeting is usually held among headman, assistant headman, and the *mantri*. Regarding government affairs, as for example, the district council issues orders to the headman for making roads or stay of any official in the village.

The headman then entrusts the *mantri* with the execution of this job. The *mantri* engage labour and collect money for this purpose. During village festivals it is the responsibility of the *mantri* to procure fowl, pig, buffalo, and other articles that are necessary for communal feast. In order to get this work done, the *mantri* depend on their under staff, *hangseobukhu*. If



the *hangsobukhu* are not available during any emergency situation, the *mantri* do the work themselves. The *hangsobukhu*, functionally, are assistant to the *mantri* and render any service as desired by them.

In the present village organisation where there is neither *mantri* nor *hangsobukhu*, the headman or assistant headman can entrust any of the villagers with these duties, but where there is a dormitory organisation (*nodrang*) usually the members of the dormitory do these duties.

The *julairao* are workers. At the time of festivals they collect fuel, banana leaves, bamboo sticks, and other articles that are required for the feast. They also serve food and rice-beer to the villagers during any communal or other feast. In other words, they are supposed to render any kind of manual labour on occasions like marriage, funeral rites and other ceremonies.

#### INDIVIDUAL'S RIGHT

The Dimasa society pays much respect to individual freedom. An individual has got all sorts of rights, e.g. social, political and religious. Of these women enjoy to a limited extent only the social right and religious rights. Social right includes the right to property. In a village *jhum* land is under the proprietorship of the whole village. Every individual has equal right over it. When a person demarcates a land for cultivation his or her right over that particular plot of land is honoured by all. A man has full right over a tree which he planted and it is inherited by his son though the land on which the tree was planted belongs to the entire village.

All sons have equal right to their father's property, whether movable or immovable. The house is generally inherited by the youngest son who resides with his parents. Otherwise the house is taken by the son who is comparatively poor. The other brothers do not claim it. The daughters have no claim over their father's property. They inherit their mother's property.

Though a man is the head of the household, he always consults his wife while taking any decision on family matters. She also expresses her opinion and judgement freely. In the

court of justice a woman has equal right to her husband. In case of any breach of trust on the part of her husband, she can ask for a divorce.

As regards political right all men have equal right in the society. The right to cast vote is universal among men. Though the headman commands authority of the village he is on the same pariance with his co-villagers from the social point of view. He takes equal part in merry-making with the villagers and suffers equally with them. It is commonly observed that during marriage and funeral ceremony the headman takes initiative and extends manual labour as much as the ordinary villagers do. He is also treated equally with ordinary villagers if he commits any offence. In Hajadisa village once a headman was excommunicated for his misdeed.<sup>1</sup> From the court cases of the district council it was observed that several allegations were filed against the misdeed or injustice of the headmen and they were prosecuted for that.\* The women are deprived of any political right. In no Dimasa village can one find a female headman and neither are they found to take part in the election of the village officials. Their domain is mainly restricted to the domestic world.

In the Dimasa society men and women have more or less equal rights to observe religious rites. But the profession of priesthood is restricted to the males only. A woman cannot be a priest or a diviner. Such vocations are, however, open to any male member of the society who has the ability to learn the art and technique. In the observance of some religious rites also the women's rights are restricted. They cannot take part in any worship that is observed in the jungle. Neither can they witness the worship of witches that is usually performed within the village boundary. It may be noted here that the art of witchcraft is associated with the women only.

#### JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The judicial system of the Dimasa has the village council at the bottom and the High Court at the top. There are two other tiers in between. These are Subordinate District Council Court and the District Council Court. As far as their powers are concerned the Subordinate District Council Court can

\* Summaries of court cases have been given in Appendix A.



imprison an offender upto a period of three years and the District Council Court can sentence to imprisonment upto five years. The High Court and the Subordinate District Council Court do not have any executive responsibilities. But the village council and district council, in addition to their judicial power, perform some executive duties also.

Basically, the Dimasa are peace-loving and law-abiding people, and generally they do not infringe upon their traditional laws. From the early age of their life they get used to their tradition and customs. Disputes have, however, been reported. These can be grouped as offence against person and offence against property.

Most of the disputes are settled in the village council, particularly, the cases of adultery, divorce and similar other cases. In case of any complaint both the complainant and the accused are asked to appear before the village council with their respective witnesses if any. They are given opportunity to support or defend their cases. Then by a majority decision the case is settled. It may be noted here that when a case is tried by the village council, in *Mikir Hills sarkari gaonbura* is also invited to be present at the time of trial. In the North Cachar Hills where there is no *sarkari gaonbura*, the *mouzadar* is requested to be present at the time of trial. Before taking any final decision their opinions are sought.

Consulting a *sarkari gaonbura* or a *mouzadar* is a new introduction since the inception of autonomous district councils. Previously the village council was the sole authority to take any such decision. In an orthodox village like Semkhor, where traditional authority structure has remained unchanged, though the *mouzadar* is invited his presence or absence does not affect the decision of the village council.

The village council has the right to impose fine not exceeding Rs 50 or to excommunicate. The fine realised is shared by the members of the village who participated in the trial. The only exception to this sharing is that the *sarkari gaonbura* or in his absence the village headman gets an extra amount of Rs 5. The *mouzadar* however, gets only the usual share.

To try a case in the district council court three witnesses are always necessary. Lacking adequate witnesses they resort to

an ordeal or oath (*sama-ilungba*) according to their traditional way. Usually an accused is not allowed to take an oath. Only the complainants are allowed to do so. They swear, "if any allegations against so and so for committing such and such offence prove false, misfortune or loss of paddy, or illness, or ultimate destruction may befall on me or I should be devoured by a tiger within three months." If nothing happens to any of the family members of the person who takes the oath within the specified time then it is further extended to cover members of the entire patriclan. If nothing happens to the patriclan members either, only then is it finally accepted that the allegations were true. A tentative decision is already made by the district council court even before the period of oath is over. That decision is subjected to an appeal before the court of district council by the accused if the result of the oath proves the allegations to be false.

Among the Dimasa tiger oath is considered to be a very severe one as no funeral rites can be performed for a person who has been killed by a tiger. It may be added that an accused be allowed to take an oath only when the complainant permits him to do so. A representative of the complainant who is also a witness of the case can take an oath on behalf of the complainant. This system of taking an oath is known as *dandi*. As an oath always involves a risk, a representative can demand as much as Rs 100 for taking the oath. The *dandi* system of taking an oath is equally acceptable by the court of justice. The Dimasa in general, no matter whether literate or illiterate, have a very deep faith in the power of oath. The district council courts, however, discourage people from taking an oath.

The records of the Court of Subordinate District Council, North Cachar Hills, give some idea about the nature of cases and their decisions. It should be mentioned here that most of these cases are settled in this court. Very rarely these are forwarded to the higher court. It has been observed that a number of law suits among the Dimasa is comparatively less during the busy agricultural seasons.

The analysis of court cases, however, suggest that the Dimasa take recourse of law court when the complainants are left with no other alternative to check the offenders.



The case records also show that in almost all the cases the decisions were in favour of the complainants. The few cases where the decisions were different, in no case was the decision in favour of the accused. In most of such cases the complainants themselves withdrew the charges. It implies that the Dimasa in general are not litigant in nature.

In North Cachar Hills the Dimasa commonly come to the court when buffaloes trespass the paddy fields and destroy crop. There are two methods adopted in the North Cachar Hills to restrict the movement of buffaloes during the agricultural season. Either the paddy fields are fenced individually or a particular area is fenced for keeping all the buffaloes of the village together. The expenditure incurred for erecting fence is shared by all the buffalo owners. The latter method is found more often than the former. No matter whose buffaloes spoil the crops, all the buffalo owners share equal responsibility to compensate the loss. This is because none but the owners can identify their respective buffaloes.

In the villages of Mikir Hills there is no such dispute as they do not have wet lands for paddy cultivation. Naturally the question of buffaloes trespassing or destroying paddy does not arise at all. In Mikir Hills the paddy is grown in *jhum* land. There the wild deer and pigs sometimes destroy crops against whom no case can be filed.

Studying the case records of the district council courts, it appears that of all the reasons for suing, loss of individual or family prestige is the most important issue. Among the Dimasa the value of prestige is over-emphasised. Unless one's lost prestige is redressed, legally he or she feels humiliated. The legal mode of regaining one's lost prestige is to collect prestige-value (*izzat dabi*) in terms of money from the defamator.

It was revealed during the study that there were quite a few cases filed by the villagers against the headman. Sometimes they were advised by the *mouzadar* to settle the matter mutually. But the villagers did not compromise with an unruly headman and ultimately they appealed to the higher court. Incidentally in all such cases the headman was penalised by

by the court. From this it appears that the Dimasa society assures justice irrespective of one's possession of wealth or formal position. There is no discrimination between the rich and the poor, an ordinary villager and a headman, when a question of righteousness is concerned.

#### NOTES

1. Pakyntein, *District Census Handbook : United Mikir and North Cachar Hills, Census of India, 1961, Vol, III, p. 8.*
2. *ibid.* p. 7
3. It is a tax imposed by and payable to the district council. In Mikir Hills the rate of tax varies depending on the number of households in a village. If there are fifty households or above in a village the rate of house tax is Rs 3 per house per year. If the number of households is less the rate of tax is Rs 6 per house per year. In North Cachar Hills however, the rate of house tax is fixed at Rs 3 irrespective of the number of houses the village has.
4. In case of *jhum* cultivation the Dimasa do not have to pay any tax. Only in wet cultivation taxes are realised with permission of *mouzadar*.
5. That headman was known as *jamindar* as he used to stand as surety to other people. He was a quite good headman. But in his later age he committed incest with his daughter's daughter. At this the village people excommunicated him and his granddaughter and forced him to live outside the village. He had a son by his granddaughter. Before death the excommunicated headman suffered from ailments very seriously and requested the villagers to allow him to live in the village. He apologised to them. Then out of pity they allowed the old man to live in the village. This happened about twenty-five years ago.



## 5

### Lighter Aspects of Life

There is very little time for leisure and recreation in the everyday life of the Dimasa. The economy of *jhum* cultivation demands continuous labour for which they are always busy with agrarian activities throughout the year.

The Dimasa work very hard from dawn to dusk for their living. In the morning, it is a very common sight to find all the able-bodied men and women going to their fields for agricultural activities and to the market respectively. At midday the village becomes so calm and quiet that it appears to be deserted. Here and there one or two old women relax and the little children roam about aimlessly. The market-goers return at noon. But the village does not regain its pulse until the men folk and young boys return home in the evening. After a bath, they take their dinner and have rest. In such a setting, it is obvious that the Dimasa finds time for relaxing and recreation only in the evening.

#### LEISURE AND RECREATION

In the evening, however, people of the same sex and age-group gather in open places for gossip. In Hajadisa the men were found gossiping for hours together sometimes upto 11 o'clock<sup>1</sup> at night. In every village there are flute (*muri*) players who entertain people with their music every evening. They are accompanied by drummers with *kharam* (drum). In Hajadisa there is a very good flute player and the headman is an expert drummer. The young boys cannot afford to have a drum. They play drums only when the elders get tired and hand over the

instrument to them. Until then young boys indulge in traditional tribal tunes or Hindi film songs through a small flute (*supen*) which they make from slim bamboo nodes. The girls never play flutes of any sort. Sometimes they play drums during midday leisure when the men are out. They would, however, never do so publicly. Unmarried girls participate in dance. In the evening the gay girls practise dance along with the young boys. In Hajadisa some unmarried girls were found playing melancholic tunes on the *topang-kharam* (a harp like instrument made of reed). This is an instrument played by women only and made by themselves. Usually the married women do not join this type of recreation. Women having babies prefer to chat among themselves or with the elderly women. The evening congregations are devoid of any vocal music.

In Dimasa culture there is no place for vocal music at public functions. Songs are sung in solo or in duet in the *jhum* fields to ease the hardship of physical labour. The Dimasa songs are composed by young boys during their leisure hours. In Barawaphu village the young boys were found composing songs for the next *busu* festival. A few samples of different Dimasa songs are given in appendix C.

#### ACTIVITIES OF NODRANG

Most of the cultural activities of the Dimasa are centred around the *nodrang*. A *nodrang* is a bachelor's dormitory. It is a long house having sleeping arrangements for the bachelors. It is usually situated at the centre of the village. The house is built by the village bachelors. At the age of 12 or 13 the boys become eligible for *nodrang* membership. It is not a compulsion for the Dimasa youngsters to live in a dormitory. It has been observed that they voluntarily prefer to live there. No formality or initiation ceremony is required for entering into a *nodrang* for the first time and there is no maximum age-limit for stay there. From adolescence, boys try to get familiar with the youth and the youthful activities of the village and work under their guidance during the social occasion. Thereby they get automatically admitted to the *nodrang*. A man can live there until his marriage. The *nodrang* is meant for only the bachelors and it is also used as the club house of the village. There is no



such dormitory for the spinsters and the women are not allowed to enter a *nodrang*.

After taking their evening meal in their respective houses boys assemble in the dormitory. Their sleeping mat, pillow and other personal belongings are kept there. In a dormitory the youth enjoy their evenings in their own way. Some may have special fancy for dance and music. So they play their flute and drum and the village maidens sometimes join the party in the open courtyard of the *nodrang* for dancing. Often dance is continued up to late night. The middle-aged married and even some old men do not hesitate to join the party. They usually do not take part in singing or dance. Their participation is centred round the beating of drums. Some of the youths prefer to gossip with others of their age-group. A few of them are always industrious and spend their time in weaving baskets and mats. The boys of marriageable age or those whose marriage has already been settled spend time in romantic discussions.

As the youth share major responsibility in farming, individual village youth have their respective work load. But if the village is endangered by enemy they feel it is their joint responsibility to protect the village from the enemy attack. In normal situation also if circumstances demand, the *nodrang* members render free services like construction of roads and clearing of jungles. They are ready to carry out any order issued by the village headman. Any member of the village may ask for their joint service for house-building or clearing of jungle for agricultural purpose. When their services are requisitioned by any individual it is the custom to make payment to them and to entertain them with rice-beer.

The *nodrang* works as a highly systematised organisation to celebrate the annual harvest festival: *busu*. The boys of the *nodrang* form a *busu* celebration committee every year. One secretary and one assistant secretary are selected from the senior members of the *nodrang*. The secretary and the assistant secretary select another secretary and assistant secretary from the village maidens who help them in organising the *busu*. The rest of the boys and girls of the village work under their

leadership. The secretaries collect subscription for the purpose and organise the function.

Though there is no formal age-grade system, in the composition of *nodrang* the residents are divided into senior and junior groups according to the seniority of age and the junior members are always subservient to the seniors. Collection of firewood and lighting the fire in the dormitory during winter months are the responsibilities of the juniors. They are also responsible for cleaning the dormitory and its premises regularly. In addition to the above a *nodrang* is also a seat for the village council.

#### BUSU : THE HARVEST FESTIVAL

As *nodrang* is the most important institution of Dimasa cultural life likewise most of the cultural activities of them are centred round the festival of *busu*. The *busu* is the major festival of the Dimasa cultural life. It is celebrated once every year after harvest. There is no fixed date in the Dimasa calendar for the observance of *busu*. It is observed sometimes between November and March of the following year, depending on the harvest seasons of the particular locality. The date of observance is fixed by the villagers themselves in a special meeting of the village council. In a normal case, the *busu* has to be observed within thirty days of the first formal meeting of the *busu* observance. Villages that largely practise *jhum* cultivation observe the festival sometimes in November or December. In the wet cultivation areas the *busu* is observed late, sometimes between January or February as their harvest season is also late. The Dimasa calendar begins in the month of *Falgun* (February March). As the new year begins right after the harvest the Dimasa of these areas observe *busu* as a harvest festival as well as for welcoming the new year.

*Busu* is observed in two forms. They are known as *surem busu* and *hangseomanoba busu*. The former is the abbreviated form and the latter the elaborate form. In most of the years the villagers observe *surem busu*. It is observed for three or five days; when it is observed for three days it is known as *edining-busujiba*. *Surem* of five days is known as *hangseomonadabusujiba*. The *hangseomanoba* is celebrated for seven days. As it



is very expensive to observe *hangseomanoba* every year, most of the villages observe this elaborate form at an interval of five or seven years or in the year when they have very good harvest. The *busu* must start on such a day that it ends either on a Tuesday or Saturday. No matter whether it is *surem busu* or *hangseomanoba busu* there are arrangements for sufficient food, drink and merry-making during the festival.

*Busu* is the community festival for an entire village. Everyone takes part in it irrespective of sex and age. During the observance of this festival the routine work of the village is stopped. Villagers who work outside usually come back home for the celebration of the festival.

Though everyone takes part in *busu* it is mainly a festival of the youth. They are the organisers and workers at the same time. It requires a large number of young boys and girls to observe *busu* in its appropriate form. Where the number of young males and females is not sufficient the festival becomes lifeless. The secretary and the assistant secretary of the *busu* celebration committee are known as *nagahaja* and *nagapharai*. The female counterparts of these posts are known as *malahaja* and *malapharai*. The whole festival is planned, organised and guided by these four persons. As it is a community festival every household subscribes according to its ability. But the youth of the village shoulder the major responsibility. They do all hard labour, e.g. collection of meat and firewood, cooking of food, etc. The young women assist them in every respect. Besides, they prepare rice-beer that is consumed in huge quantity at the time of *busu*.

In some villages young boys and girls collectively cultivate *jhum* fields of other farmers and thus earn some money. This entire amount is saved for meeting the expenses of the festival. At Semkhor in 1965 the *nagarao* and the *malariao* cultivated 13 *bighas* of land in the above terms and collected about one hundred rupees. The whole amount was spent at the time of the *busu* festival of the next year.

During *busu* days the unmarried young men and women cook their food jointly and eat their food together. The old men do lighter jobs in a relaxed way. They prepare bamboo mugs for drinking rice-beer and baskets etc. that are

required at the time of the feast. The old people are supplied with *zu* (rice-beer) throughout the day that they drink like a fish. While the work is going on they joke and inspire the youth by telling them the reminiscences of their past.

The first day of *busu* is called *bususataiba* (killing day; *sataiba* means to kill). A number of animals are killed on that day. In Gidingpur in 1965 one buffalo and two pigs were killed on the first day of *busu*. The buffalo that was brought for this purpose was shot to death in a nearby jungle of the village. The pigs were killed within the village boundary. A major portion of meat of these animals was consumed by the villagers in a communal feast. The rest was shared by them equally, smoked and preserved.

In the first day of *busu* the young boys gather in front of the headman's house in the afternoon, and together chant 'ho ! ho !'. Thus they announce the coming of *busu*. In the Dimasa language it is called *surem*. This chanting also indicates the welcome to guests. This is followed by devotional songs sung by middle-aged men of the village. After that the elderly men and women gather in the courtyard of the wealthy men of the village and are entertained with curry (both vegetables and meat) and rice-beer. In Gidingpur the headman and the assistant headman, being the most wealthy persons entertained the co-villagers. The male guests usually take their seats in the open courtyard and the women sit inside the house. Whosoever the host may be, everything is managed by the young boys of the village. Both men and women are served with food by them. When the young boys who managed the feast take their food they are served by the young girls. After that the *busu* dance begins.

The Dimasa dances are slow in rhythm and movement. At the time of dance a fire is ablaze near the dancing ground. There is no sex appeal in their dance. Usually, dance is accompanied with flute and drums. There is not much variety in Dimasa dances. As they dance more or less in the same style throughout the night, it seems a bit monotonous. If anybody gets tired or feels the chill he is usually replaced by another dancer. As the dance continues the dancers get refreshed by rice-beer by turns and warm themselves at the fire place. In



the late hours of night when the spectators get tired and feel sleepily they retire. But the dancers continue their performance till the morning.

About 25 boys and girls dance together. The function begins with *madaikhilimba* dance. It means salutation to gods with folded hands. There are different kinds of *busu* dances. They have been described below :

#### *Madaikhilimba*

It is a dance with a circular movement. Both boys and girls, with folded hands, take part in this dance. They move around the courtyard with rhythmic steps and pay homage to gods in different directions.

#### *Jaobani*

In this dance the dancers stand in a circle and move around. While dancing, at first the dancers raise their right hand then both the hands are raised and the area is encircled without lifting the legs. They virtually brush the floor with their feet. It is a very slow dance. Both boys and girls take part in this dance.

#### *Namalaiba*

It means fish dance (*na* means fish). In this dance the same number of boys and girls stand in two parallel rows separately. While dancing boys and girls cross each others row very swiftly, but they don't touch one another. They move simultaneously.

#### *Baimiung*

It means elephant dance. In this dance boys and girls stand alternately and form a circle. While dancing they imitate the movements of elephant trunks with their hands. This is also a very slow dance.

In addition to the abovementioned dances there are a few dances that are very rarely performed. Though these are not exactly *busu* dances, these can be performed at the time of *busu* also. In these dances activities like harvest, well digging, etc. are demonstrated. During the regime of Kachari kings the

common people would work for the royal family. In these dances group activities for the Kachari kings are also represented.

The war dance is not popular among the Dimasa. It has been observed only at Semkhor. There they have a different classification of dances. These are *baidima* and *bimagam*. The first type refers to the traditional Dimasa dances (*bai* means dance and *dima* stands for the Dimasa). The other type refers to the dance of the Naga or with the Naga (in Dimasa language *maga* refers to the Naga).

*Baidima* is performed on the first day of *busu*. *Baimagam* are war dances and are performed on the second day of *busu*. *Baidima* includes all traditional dances like *jaobani*, *namalaiba*, *madaikhilimba*, etc., and both boys and girls take part in *baidima* dances. *Baimagam* are performed by the boys only. In *baimagam* dance one or two boys are dressed like the Naga with Naga costumes and Naga spears. Others being dressed like Dimasa warriors attack them with Dimasa spears. In the dance the Naga warriors are killed by the Dimasa in a mock fight. This dance refers to an ancient battle that took place between the then Dimasa king and the Nagas near Semkhor village. In the Dimasa dance of Semkhor, the Naga influence is very clear even in the dance performed by the girls. Quite a few Naga dances have become mixed up with the Dimasa traditional dances of Semkhor and made the slow dances more rapid and lively.

The second day of *busu* is known as *busuma*. This is the most important day and the observance of *busugaba*, the most important ritual of *busu*, is performed on this day. *Busugaba* signifies paying homage to the elders. The juniors show ceremonial respect to the seniors by giving clothes, money, and one *lauthau* (ceremonial pot made from a special type of small gourd) of rice-beer. Only the married men and women are entitled to observe *busugaba*.

The nature of observance of *busugaba* has changed now. As they cannot afford to pay money and other things these days, they only offer rice-beer to the elders. On that day fathers cannot enter into the house of their respective children nor elder brothers and sisters enter into the house of their respective



younger brothers and sisters until *busugaba* is observed at 12 o'clock sharp.

The first offering is made to the parents. When the parents are no longer alive the persons who received the bride and bridegroom in marriage ceremony as parents receive the homage. They are ceremonially accepted as father and mother. This type of ceremonial 'father' is known as *garao* and the ceremonial 'mother' is called *garyaba*. Next comes the turn of the members of patriclan and then the members of the matriclan. The next and the last offerings are paid to the affinal kin. Offerings are always made to the seniors only.

In a Dimasa village almost all the families are interrelated. Naturally, every junior member pays respect to all senior members. Offering of homage to the parents is obligatory. In cases of other senior relatives it is optional in the sense that if the economic condition permits they observe it. However, those who come from outside the village to attend *busu*, carry rice-beer to offer during *busugaba*.

Another important observance of the second day of *busu* is *makhmagarkhaoba*. This is the last offering made to the dead of the previous year. With the observances of *makhmagarkhaoba* all connections with the dead are severed.

On the day of *busuma* a communal feast is organised. Domestic cooking is closed for the day. But in every house they make arrangements for entertaining the guests with rice-beer, meat, and vegetables. If a poor family cannot arrange for meat and vegetables, arrangements for only rice-beer is made. The wealthy, however, sometimes arrange a gala feast. As stated earlier, in Gidingpur it has been observed that the wealthy people entertain the entire village with rice-beer, meat, and staple food. Quite often a Dimasa exhausts one-third or half of the total production of the year during the festival of *busu*. In the Dimasa society the offerings of such a feast are highly valued. It adds to the prestige of the person who entertains the guests. In such a feast people do not wait for any invitation. They simply swarm there carrying their bamboo mugs. In fact, they carry the bamboo mug throughout the day and indulge in drinking as much as they can.

Those who come from outside the village visit all the relatives

in that particular village and have food and drink there. The outsiders joke in verse with the host, "We have heard that there is a heap of meat in your village and *zu* (rice-beer) has flooded the entire area. Now we see only a piece of egg and nothing else." The host replies "Oh greedy kid, you have not come for *busu*. It is meat and *zu* that has attracted you." Then the guests defend themselves: "No, we have come to see our parents and to offer *busugaba*". Thus, mock altercations in verse and song continue along with food. Even when meat and drink are offered, the same jokes more or less, are exchanged.

The second day of *busu*, begins with a *ho! ho!* cry by the village youth in front of the headman's house. Then the youth visit the house of other dignitaries of the village and repeat the chant. In every house they are entertained with food and drink. After that they encircle the village three times with a loud cry.

When the observance of *busugaba* is over, the young men and women dressed in gay and colourful dresses visit every house in order to seek blessings (*khilimfy*) from the elders. The elders bless them, "You will get charming spouses of your choice." Then they assemble in front of the *nodrang*. In villages where sports and games are organised, some youth announce the news of sports beforehand. This announcement is called *haoba*. Arrangements for sports and games are also previously made. When the youth assemble there the sports and games begin. Only the boys take part in the sports and games and the women and the old are simple spectators. Sometimes some elderly people take part in sports in order to add fun to the occasion. The important sports and games are *harangbaiba* (long jump), *longhailamba* (stone throw) and *romonalaiba* (test of strength by pushing a piece of bamboo at each other).

When the sports and games are over, the participants gather in the house of the headman in order to demand honorarium for their performance. The headman entertains them with rice-beer and presents a lump sum amount. In Gidingpur the headman paid them Rs 20 and entertained them with as much rice-beer as they could drink. The boys bargained and got an additional sum of Rs 1.20. The young boys praised him, "You



have given us *zu* and money with liberal hands, may God give you more." Then begins the programme for the night. Usually it begins with *busu* dance. In some villages a competition among flutists is organised before the *busu* dance and prizes like handkerchiefs, vests, are presented. The rest of the night is spent in dancing.

During the last few days there is no other special programme or observance except the last day when *gerba* is observed. Before that the rest of the *busu* days are observed in having sufficient amount of food and drink and merry-making. Observance of *busugerba* is the last item of *busu* no matter whether it is *surem* or *hangseomanoba*. *Busugerba* is the communal worship observed by the entire village during *busu*. *Gerba* means communal worship. When *busugerba* is observed no outsider is allowed to stay in the village. If someone does he has to remain in the village till *busu* for the next year is observed. The *busugerba* is observed up to 12.00 noon. Naturally, nobody is allowed to get in or get out of the village until 12.00 o'clock. If a villager wants to move to a different village he cannot visit the place of *gerba*. As it has already been stated, *gerba* is always observed in a nearby jungle outside the village. *Busugerba* is observed in order to purify the village. As during the observance of *busu* the village has to accommodate many outside guests and if laws and customs are not very rigidly followed, it is feared that a bad spirit may take shelter in the village. The observance of *gerba* keeps such evil spirits away from the village.

#### *The Elaborate Form of Busu*

*Hangseomanoba* is the most elaborate form of observance of *busu*. In the observance of *hangseomanoba* the responsibilities for organising the festival are taken by two *nagahoja*, two *malahoja* two *nagapharai* and two *malapharai*. It means that the strength of the office-bearers is doubled in this case.

Whether a village will observe *hangseomanoba* or not is decided by the village youth in an informal meeting long before the actual observance of the festival. Then they inform the headman of their decision. In the formal meeting, the *nagahoja* select a couple of the village as *gejaibao* and *gejaibaojik*.

When the observance of *busu* is over the village youth work in the *jhum* field of the *gejaibao*. In return he entertains them with food and drink on every working day. When the harvest is over the *gejaibao* entertains the youth again. If there is a bumper crop a small portion of the yield is also given to the village youth who are free to utilise them according to their will.

*Hangseomanoba* is, as stated earlier, observed for seven days. The first day is called *nagaraoni sataiba*. This is the day when the unmarried youth of the village kill animals that are consumed during *busu* feast after three days. It may be mentioned here that killing of animal is taboo in the village on the day of the feast. The second day of *hangseomanoba* is known as *haingaraoni sataiba* which means the killing of animals by the married youngmen. In the case of *hangseomanoba*, *busugaba* is observed on the third day instead of the second (as in the case of other forms of observance of *busu*). The rest of the four days do not have any special ceremony or any other performance. They are spent in consuming enormous quantity of food and drink and in merry-making. The *gerba* is performed on the eighth day that indicates the close of the observance of *busu*.

At the time of *hangseomanoba* a beautiful gate (*phangsla*) is made with bamboo and cane at the main entrance of the village. The unmarried girls wait there to receive the village youth when they return to the village after buying the animals for the *busu* feast. When the animals are slaughtered in the jungle and brought home by the village youth, they are again received at the *phangsla* by the unmarried girls. A highly decorated dancing arena is also constructed at the time of *hangseomanoba*. A flute is played there non-stop for all the seven days of the observance of *busu*. When one player gets tired he is replaced by another.

In addition to fun and merry-making the *busu* has many other social implications in the Dimasa life. With the elapse of a year's hard toil they welcome *busu* as an auspicious day. They thank God by saying, "O God, it is your gift to us. We cannot leave it in exchange of gold and silver". During the *busu* days the Dimasa overcome the triviality of everyday life.



They patch up all differences and the entire village becomes one entity. This is a day of joy and adoration.

### NOTES

- They do not find it necessary to measure time in hours and minutes. Their concept of time is related to nature, like morning, evening, night, etc.

## 6

### The Other World

The idea of religion is somewhat vague among the Dimasa. They consider themselves to be Hindu though they have only a faint idea about Hinduism. The Dimasa have their own gods and goddesses. Nowadays they identify some of their traditional deities with the deities of the Hindu pantheon. The Dimasa deity Shivrui and Ranachandi are identified with the Shiva and Kali of the Hindu mythology. However, no Hindu god as such, except Satyanarayana is incorporated in the Dimasa culture. Only in Sujiling village the Hindu deity Satyanarayana was found to be propitiated. This seems to be a very recent introduction to the Dimasa culture as their traditional priest is still unfamiliar with the knowledge of worship of Satyanarayana. In Sujiling the head of the households were found worshipping the deity in the Hindu manner. The sacrifice of animal which is a must in their traditional way of worship is not done at the time of worship of Satyanarayana. Instead, the deity is offered with fruits and sweets. The school-going children of the Dimasa show considerable interest in the worship of Saraswati (goddess of learning). This worship is also performed in the typical Hindu manner. Sometimes the elderly people also take part in the worship of Saraswati. The Bengalee Hindu teacher of the village school plays a major role in this worship. They also arrange the needful. The villagers also show much interest and bear all expenses of the worship. The Hindu deity Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) has also become popular among the Dimasa. Though they do not worship Lakshmi they identify



their own goddess Longmailaisa (the goddess of paddy) with Lakshmi. They have a great fear and reverence about the goddess Kali. They bow down to the Kali temple of Mahur and pay cash offerings as salutation fee to the deity.

Though the Dimasa call themselves Hindu this could not alter their notions towards their traditional faith and belief. They do not think that the worship of the Hindu deities can either avert their dangers or cure diseases. They rather accept these kind of worships as a sort of gay occasion. The Dimasa are charmed by the grace and beauty of the images of Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati and are amazed by the image of Kali. The external features of the worships of these deities attract them more than the inner philosophy of Hinduism. There could be another explanation for the Dimasa inclination toward Hinduism. As Hinduism is associated with the people who have a greater control over technology than themselves, the Dimasa feel a sort of pride by identifying themselves as Hindus and adapting the Hindu way of life. This seems to elevate their position among the neighbouring tribes. The Dimasa, in fact, consider themselves superior to other neighbouring tribes.

Due to their extreme dependency on nature the Dimasa religion is mainly built around natural phenomena. The spirit of jungle, rivers, rain, tree are important to them and worshipped once a year. It is customary that when they will clear jungle or cut any big tree they will offer worship to their respective spirits. They are supposed to protect them from innumerable evil spirits and ghosts hovering in the air. Thus nature works as the guardian of the Dimasa.

#### AREA GOD

They explain the natural phenomena and the origin of human beings from the same myth of creation<sup>1</sup> which is very important in the Dimasa culture. It goes like this : the original mother laid seven eggs from which six gods or progenitors of men were created. These were Shivray, Aluraja, Naikhuraja, Woaraja, Gunyung Braiyung and Hamiadao. From the seventh egg came out the evil spirits. They are worshipped at the time of cultivation or during any disease or when a misfortune befalls men. The six gods are treated as the ancestral deities

of the Dimasa and the whole Dimasa land is under their jurisdiction. Thus came the concept of area god among them.

As the whole of the Dimasa land is under their control, the area gods have their unstructured mythical shrine in different localities of the traditional Dimasa territory. It is believed that the god of a particular area controls the lives of the Dimasa of the area. In olden days a particular clan had its concentration in a specific area and gradually that clan became the priest of the area god of that locality. The abodes or unstructured shrines are known as *daikho*.

The gods of different *daikhos* have different presiding deities, viz. Aluraja of *aiu daikho*, Naikhuraja of *riao daikho*. These gods have no representative image. At the time of worship they are represented by earthen mounds. They are worshipped along with their spouses and children.

A big mound is raised by the priest and it is surrounded by a number of similar mounds which are supposed to be the wives and children of the principal deity. Sometimes the term *khel* is used to indicate the area of a particular *daikho*, e.g. *alukhel*, *manjakhel*. If the people of one particular *daikho* or *khel* leave that area and settle in a place belonging to a different *daikho*, they propitiate the presiding deity of the new settlement. They may also offer worship to their previous *daikho* as well. The worship of the area-god is held once a year. All the Dimasa under the jurisdiction of a particular god bear the expenditure of worship by voluntary contribution. A large number of goats and fowls are sacrificed on this occasion. One male member of each household from each and every village must participate in the annual worship of the area-god.

Most probably the concept of area-god has evolved from the concept of clan-god. The clan-gods are also worshipped once every year. The people of different clans of Barawaphu village like to designate themselves as the people of different *daikhos*, though they are at present under the jurisdiction of *riao daikho*. Even now in the remote Dimasa village of Semkhor of North Cachar Hills each clan has its separate *daikho* situated in the vicinity of the village. There the *daikhos* are still considered as clan-gods.

The *Daikhos* have their respective priests from different clans.



It may be suggested that when the clans were localised and few in number they had their own gods. Later on with the increase of population and dispersal of clans a number of clans were grouped under a god and thus evolved the concept of area-god.

TABLE 16  
*Distribution of Area Gods*

Name of the <i>daikho</i>	Tutelary gods	Clan of the priests	Place of worship and jurisdiction
Alu	Aluraja	Daulagopo	Confluence of Mahur and Diyung river
Baiglai	Not known	Langthasa	Interior of Hajadisa
Hamri	"	Thaosen	Diyung valley
Haor	"	Not known	Silchar
Longmailai (God of paddy)	"	"	Haflong area
Manja	Gunung braiyung	Thaosen, Adao	Langting
Misim	Misimraja	Daliyasa	Dhansiri river valley
Mongrang (War God)	Mongrang	Batari	Maibang
Ranchandi	Not known	Thaosen	Mahur
Riao	Naikhuraja	Phonglosa	Haflong, Maibang, Mahur
Wajbra	Not known	Diphusa	Lanka (Mikir Hills)
Woa	Woaraja	Khemprai	All over the Dimasa territory

The above *daikho* are now present throughout the Dimasa territory. There were a few other *daikho* as well, viz. Demra, Rengma, Dijoa, Gisia and Damdi, inhabiting the areas of Hojai (Nowgong District), Diphu (Mikir Hills) and Dimapur (Nagaland). As the Dimasa moved from these places these *daikho* have been abandoned. The places where these gods are believed to have resided, however, are carefully avoided by the Dimasa.

#### DEITIES, SPIRITS AND GHOSTS

Besides nature gods and area gods, the Dimasa have strong belief in the existence of various deities, spirits and ghosts

scattered around their physical environment who control their life to a great extent. That is why for a peaceful coexistence with them worship of these deities and spirits are needed. So, in order to avoid their wrath they are propitiated or pleased by offering prayer, sacrifice, etc., on many occasions. Religious observances are more important to them than the abstract ideas of religion.

The deities are always supposed to be benevolent and most of them are propitiated for general welfare. Some of them have special function, for example, Khandisa the deity for child welfare and Sani for strength and general health. There are some other deities, viz. Hagrani, the god of jungle, Malraja, the river god, Mongrang, the war god and so on. They are worshipped once every year for the general welfare of the family and of the village. These deities are believed to be harmless if they are not worshipped even once in a year. On the other hand the spirits have power to control human beings in some way or the other. If they are not propitiated properly they inflict sufferings on men. That is why the Dimasa are more afraid of the spirits than the deities and naturally are more careful to observe the worship of the former than the latter. The spirits and deities are made responsible for diseases. Whenever anybody falls sick the responsible deity or spirit is figured out by the medicine-man. For curing the disease worships are offered to the respective deity or spirit. However, minor ailments, get cured in their natural course. But they interpret it as an act of kindness of the deity or spirit itself. More often it happens that in spite of repeated offerings to the deities the patient did not improve or survive. The ineffectiveness of worship for curing disease does not make any crack in their traditional faith over the supernatural agencies. However, nowadays in the village of Mikir Hills people think modern medicine is also necessary along with their traditional worship. A few cases of such worship has been given in the appendix.

The Dimasa cannot think of any image of the deities and spirits whatsoever. Earthen mounds are raised on the occasion of worship of some of the deities and sometimes the emblem of gods are placed there. For example miniature shields and spears are placed on the ground as an insignia of war god. It should



be mentioned here that all the deities and spirits of the Dimasa though do not have any anthropomorphic shape, belong to either of the sexes, and some of them have spouses also. For example, when the goddess Khandisa is worshipped her husband is also propitiated. The god Tilaju is worshipped with his wife and they are represented by one large and one small earthen mound respectively.

The Dimasa believe that there are innumerable evil spirits and ghosts hovering in the air. They roam about here and there unnoticeably and are the cause of trouble to the people. Deaths, diseases and accidents are attributed to the anger of the spirits and ghosts. The medicineman can only detect the nature and sex of the spirits and ghosts. They are worshipped in a jungle or on the riverside during day time. The most malevolent spirits are the *Sagainjik*. They are seven in number and considered as seven sisters who are propitiated with great fear and respect. They have the power to kill a human being or an animal. At times the seven sisters are treated as witches and propitiated accordingly. Generally, they worship them once every year. Worship of these spirits is held within the village on the new moon night. All the offerings including sacrificed goat are thrown outside the village and nobody consume them. The women are not allowed to attend the worship of *Sagainjik* as witchcraft is mostly a feminine business. The women who are wicked in nature are usually called *Sagainjik*. During the worship of other malevolent spirits no such strictness is observed so far as the offerings are concerned. However, women do not take part in the worship of any spirits.

The Dimasa believe that if persons die unmarried or meet with unnatural deaths they become ghosts and demons. The demons devour man. There is another type of spirit called *hachong*. They try to mislead people in hills and forests and confuse them in the guise of friends or relatives. If it is a very cruel type of spirit, it urinates in the eyes of a man who as a result, becomes blind. A man can identify this evil spirit by its leg as it is believed that the left leg of this spirit is shorter than the right. If anybody looks at it upwardly it becomes larger and larger in shape. Therefore, it is advisable to look downward when a man is encountered by such type of spirits. Then

it gradually becomes smaller and finally vanishes. There is however, no systematic ritual to appease them.

#### CONCEPT OF SUPREME BEING AND REBIRTH

The Dimasa have a very faint concept of supreme being. They think that there is an All Creator living in the heaven. As He is harmless the Dimasa's attitude toward Him is rather indifferent. They call him *Madai*. There is no definite worship of *Madai*. During any auspicious occasion like marriage, harvest festival, etc., *madaikhilimba* is held jointly by all the people who offer salutations with folded hands. Sometimes they pray to him *madai ankhe hamsi sangma nangnang raikhe hamnang mu*, which means "May God bless us."

The Dimasa believe in reincarnation. It is a general belief that according to one's earthly deeds one is destined to a better or worse life in the next birth. The concept of good and evil, honesty and dishonesty are reflected in the idea of rebirth though the concept of virtue and vice is not counted much. According to Dimasa theology, in order to have a birth in human form, a man has to perform all his duties properly which means that he should take care of his old parents and after their death perform funeral rituals with due regards. One should be loyal to one's wife and fulfil his obligations to the family and village. In a word as a member of the society he should lead an honest life, i.e. he must follow the established rules and norms of the society. One should not violate the rules of incest, nor indulge in adultery or black magic, or practise any unlawful activity theft or murder. If a person violates the norm it is believed that he would be deprived of the chance of rebirth in human species. On the contrary an evil-doer will be reborn as a hateful animal or it may be so that he would not be reborn and will wander in the air like a spirit which, according to Dimasa concept, is a severe punishment to a human soul. The Dimasa do not have the concept of salvation of soul.

Though they have the concept of life beyond death, they have no clear idea of heaven and hell. They think that there is a land for the dead which they call *damra*. In *damra* the dead retain their earthly nature and necessities. The special



characteristic feature is that everything in *damra* is just the reverse of everything on the earth. They take food by left hand and move backwards. It is for this reason that the Dimasa offer food to the spirit of the dead with the left hand.

#### SOUL AND THE LAND OF THE DEAD

Some ritualistic beliefs connected with death throw light on the Dimasa concept of soul (*bese*). They believe that the soul does not decay with physical death of a man. It maintains its continuity through the process of birth and rebirth. The soul is immortal and it is manifested in the repetition of births. When a person dies, his or her soul transforms into spirit (*simung*). It resides in the cremation ground until the final food offering (*makhmagarkhaoba*) is held at the time of obsequy or the annual harvest festival. Besides, during the mourning period food is regularly offered to the spirit in the cremation ground. As it is believed that the cremation ground is the abode of the spirits, nobody goes there at night. With the observance of final food offering the relation between the spirit of the dead and its living relatives is severed completely. Then the spirit is eligible for rebirth. To make a distinction between the spirit and soul the Dimasa associate the former with the bones of the dead and that is why charred bone is buried in the cremation ground under the temporary shelter made for the spirit. On the day of obsequy the bone is immersed into water in order to drive away the spirit.

#### GENERAL FEATURES OF WORSHIP

Rituals are observed with regard to different gods, goddesses and spirits both benevolent and malevolent. The rituals are observed in the form of worship either performed individually or communally. Among the Dimasa the number of religious observances by individuals is much greater than the number of communal worship. Only the *gerba*, agricultural rituals and the worship of the area-gods are held jointly. The *gerba* is observed by the people of an entire village. This is performed for the general welfare of the village. Ordinarily, it is observed once every year after the harvest festival. It is always held at the outskirts of the village. At the time of worship the entrance

of the village is symbolically closed with some wooden post and no one is allowed to enter into or exit from the village. This restriction is observed for the first half of the day until the ritual is over. The expenditure incurred for this ritual is shared by the villagers equally. The headman fixes the rate of subscription. Besides, when marriage ceremony or a funeral feast is over, *gerba* is performed. It is because during those occasions many people gather in a village from different villages. It is believed that many evil spirits also follow them and may enter into the village. When all outsiders depart from the village, *gerba* is performed to scare away the evil spirits. However, in such cases the expenditure of the ritual is borne by that family only who is responsible for the occasion. Mainly, the old people attend the worship.

The rituals connected with cultivation are also held communally. The cost of the ritual is shared by all the farmers of the village. Sometimes, these rituals are also observed individually as it was noticed in Hajadisa village during the course of this study.

The worship of the area-god is also held communally but not by all the villagers at a time. The people of different patrilineal clans organise this worship separately in different times and at different places. In fact the place of worship of each area-god is traditionally fixed. The people of a village attend the worship of their respective area-god. The rate of subscription is determined by the general committee of worship. The people attend the worship with the due subscriptions either in cash or kind. In no case, the women attend any communal worship.

Worship is usually an individual affair among the Dimasa. As stated earlier, anyone of the villagers can perform the rituals to propitiate the forest god before *jhum* cultivation. There is nothing like a village shrine or deity. Thus the scope for communal worship is very limited in the village. It is observed that the individual family performs different rituals for general welfare of the family or getting cured from a disease. Among the Dimasa, the gods and spirits are worshipped with a definite purpose. The concept of virtue by dint of worship only is not known to them. That is why they do not observe any ritual



for ritual's sake. All the ritualistic performances have a functional utility. Rather they think that rituals are a must to them as their life is controlled by numerous gods and spirits. It is due to the environmental factor and way of life that they have become so dependent on the supernatural agencies. It is their belief that forests are always inhabited by different kinds of spirits. If they want to coexist with these supernatural beings they are to be appeased by ritualistic offerings.

#### OFFERINGS

The ritual offerings are almost common in all the worship performed communally or individually. Offerings mainly consist of rice powder, rice-beer and eggs. Animal sacrifice is one of the essential items in this propitiation. Goats, fowls, pigeons are sacrificed to propitiate deities or spirits. The blood of the sacrificial animal as well as its cooked meat is also offered to the deities and spirits. In certain rituals betel leaf, areca nut, flowers and lighting of lamp are also necessary as prerequisites to the rituals.

The devotee himself cannot offer a worship to the deities directly. He has to take the help of a priest who renders all ritual services on behalf of his client. The priest prepares a little quantity of rice-beer in his house for ritual offerings. He also beheads the sacrificial animal. The priest, however, is not paid for his services excepting in rare cases. Sometimes, he is given a new piece of cloth as a part of ritual by the devotee. Of course the devotee has to observe fast until the ritual is over. The meat of the sacrificial animal is cooked by the assistant priest. Utensils and other accessories are taken to the place of worship by the devotee himself from his house. Besides, all the people who gather there extend their assistance by collecting firewood, banana leaf etc., for the completion of the ritual. They are generally invited by the devotee. The question of invitation does not arise when a ritual takes place in the forest. Any number of men can attend the worship and they would be entertained with consecrated food. But when a ritual takes place in the house of an individual only the invitees attend that. The assistant priest serves the consecrated food (cooked meat) to the people. An ordinary ritual costs approximately Rs 10 to

Rs 15. In certain cases, specially in the worship of the witches, the ritual offerings, even the sacrificial meat cannot be taken by the priest or the devotee. No one would take the consecrated food of the witch worship. It is found in Hajadisa that the entire amount of meat of sacrificial goat was thrown away on the outskirts of the village. It is believed that only the witches can take this food.

#### PRIESTHOOD

As stated earlier, the Dimasa cannot worship the deity directly. Usually, a man with special knowledge about the deities and the art of their propitiation works as intermediary between the devotee and the deity. This intermediate person is known as priest (*jenthai*). Priesthood is not hereditary. It is restricted to the menfolk only. Any man interested in priesthood may learn the art and technique of worship from an expert. A particular priest cannot act as intermediary for all the deities. So, a number of priests are found in a single village. Ordinary people learn a few household rituals by which they can perform elementary worship which are to be performed during pregnancy or childbirth. The worship of the deities and spirits are entirely the specialised job of the priest.

An interested person usually assists a priest in his ritualistic activities from his adolescence and thus learns the art of priesthood. This apprentice priest is called *dainya*. The priest takes the assistance of *dainya* in any worship with elaborate rituals. Sometimes more than one assistant is required. During the apprenticeship period the assistant only carries out the order of the priest by supplying necessary articles for rituals, for preparing the consecrated food. Thus he learns the techniques of worship. The priest teaches him the secret incantations during the last phase of apprenticeship and finally permits him to perform independently. Generally it is found that the assistant priest becomes a full priest after the death of his preceptor. No special ritualistic relationship persists between the priest and his apprentice. The former has no control over the secular life of the latter. But it is commonly found that an assistant priest likes to remain in contact with his master, in secular activities also like cultivation and hunting.



Though a Dimasa priest is not bound to lead an austere life he has to observe certain formalities prior to any worship. Most of the worships are held in the morning. On the previous night the priest must not live together with his wife. Ritual purity and impurity are also emphasised in case of a priest before he performs worship. He should take bath to prepare the sacred rice-beer and observe fast until the worship is completed. For his service the priest does not get any remuneration. This profession, rather, compels him to serve the villagers when called for even in the busy season of cultivation. Of course, he is respected by the people for his special knowledge.

In addition to the professional priest there is another type of religious functionary as *phatri*. When any natural calamity like famine or draught occurs in the vicinity the *phatri* is called on for remedial rituals. The art and functions of a *phatri* cannot be performed after formal training. It is considered that a man must have some power in him to be regarded as a *phatri*. That is why he is highly esteemed in the society. By virtue of his personal power he exerts his influences on supernatural beings through some miraculous activities and revelations. If any calamity occurs during the year a *phatri* is called on at the time of annual worship of the area-god. There he falls in a trance and delivers an oracular speech and answers the questions of the people and suggests some remedial rituals. He shows many feats in that condition.

The concept of magic is well established in the society. Like the *phatri*, the magicians are also self-employed. They have special magical powers which cannot be learnt. By means of divination they can find out a reason for personal injury and ailment and suggest probable remedy for that. As the art of divination cannot be learnt, different magicians employ different methods, like measuring a rope or stick or playing with *cowri* shells. They explain the cause of disease and the nature of the spirits responsible for that by the length of the rope or stick or the positions of the *cowri* shells. The Dimasa follow their instructions almost blindly. Though most of the time their suggestions do not show the expected result, people continue to consult the magicians and perform a different set of rituals with the aid of the priest. For this job of divination the medicineman does not

demand any payment. Almost all the Dimasa villages have one or two diviners.

The idea of black magic is also known among the Dimasa though not commonly practised. It is believed that some women have got the power of doing evil by means of black magic. These women are marked as witches (*Saguinjik*) in the society and avoided by the people. Their look is so evil that it may cause harm to the babies it is believed. Though witchcraft is attributed to the women, man may also acquire the power of black magic (*jadu*) from Kamakhya.<sup>2</sup> The ordinary people are quite afraid of those who profess to have the power of black magic. These type of women or men are, however, rarely found in a Dimasa village.

The details of rituals and worship of Dimasa gods are given in appendix D.

#### NOTES

1. According to the Dimasa myth of creation there was one *Banglaraja* and his wife *Arikhidima*. They inhabited in the heaven (*damra*). At that time the present world was a great vacuum. Once *Arikhidima* conceived and then the golden eagle was sent to search out a suitable place for delivery. After a great search it found a suitable place in the confluence of Sangriba and Dalaobra. There she laid seven eggs from which she hatched out six eggs. The eldest became great god Shivray, the creator of mankind. He was followed by Aluraja, Naikhuraja, Woaraja, Gunyung Braiyung and Hamiadao. The seventh egg did not hatch in time and lastly was broken by naughty Hamiadao. As soon as it was broken thousands of evil spirits and devils emerged. Then the kind Shivray allocated them the hills and rivers. Thus they became spirits of hills and rivers. Then they were named as Diphuraja, Dipongiraja, Disimraja and so on.
2. One of the fifty-two pilgrim centres relating to Shakti cult.



## Changing Dimasa Life

From the very beginning of the Kachari dynasty in Assam, round about 1215 A.D., the Kachari people were surrounded by the advanced groups like the Bengalees, Assamese and the tribals viz. Naga and Kuki. By the thirties of the 18th century the Kachari king was converted to Hinduism by a Bengalee Brahman. Along with the king a large number of his subjects also embraced Hinduism. In the plains of Cachar there is a great concentration of the Hindu Dimasa, who are known as Kachari or Burman Kachari. This is the first evidence of any major change in the Dimasa culture.

The Dimasa of the hills, on the other hand lived for long in isolation in interior forests and were less affected by any alien culture. In recent years, with the spread of urban influence and market economy the Dimasa of the hills are also coming in greater contact with alien people and this in turn is moulding their culture to a considerable extent. The main alien groups and agencies that are influencing the Dimasa culture these days are the neighbouring tribal and non-tribal people, markets, and the district council office.

There are numerous tribal groups in the District of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. The Dimasa are surrounded by the Mikir, Zemi Naga, and Hmar Kuki tribes and because of their continuous contact with these people they have internalised certain traits that are alien to the traditional Dimasa culture. There is definite evidence of Zemi Naga influence in the folk songs and dances of the Dimasa. As stated earlier, the villagers of Semkhor and its neighbourhood had protracted

battles with the Nagas in the past. This is depicted in the *baimagam* dance of the Dimasa which is performed at the time of *busu* festival. Though the dance represents enmity between the Naga and the Dimasa, the dance itself bears sufficient evidence of the Naga influence. The dress of the Dimasa males of the locality also shows a very close resemblance to that of the Naga males. The adoption of those elements of Naga culture probably took place when a cordial relationship was established after the war. At least these were not cases of imposition as there is no historical evidence of Dimasa subjugation by the Nagas.

The Dimasa living in the close proximity of towns and markets, are highly influenced by the Bengalees, Assamese and the Nepalis because of their personal contact. They visit urban areas and markets regularly to sell their commercial crops and for purchase of their necessary articles. This helped them to develop trade relationship with the businessmen of various communities like Marawari, Muslim, Bengalee, Nepali, and Assamese. Thus market plays an important role as an agency of cultural contact for them. The markets of Lumding, Maibong, Mahur, and Haflong control the major market transactions of the Dimasa. Of these only Lumding has a daily market. The others are weekly or bi-weekly markets. In all these markets the Dimasa people have trade relationships fixed with certain dealers from whom they borrow money prior to cultivation, under the agreement of clearing up the dues by the produce of the next harvest. The Dimasa show keen interest in maintaining good relationships with the businessmen. They also show high regard for them as in the Dimasa area the business community constitutes the most sophisticated people.

This contact with outsiders has, however, influenced the Dimasa outlook and there are some enthusiastic and intelligent men among the Dimasa who have started partnership business with the Bengalee traders and are supplying wood and bamboo to the Military authorities.

The Dimasa do not know the art of smithery. Naturally, they are in constant contact with the goldsmiths and blacksmiths for making or buying ornaments and iron implements respectively. There are cases when some simple villagers were



cheated by some unscrupulous traders. But nowadays, with their growing experience, the Dimasa have become aware of the shrewdness of those traders and naturally they deal with them with appropriate tact and caution.

The connections of the Dimasa with market centres are sufficiently old. But the changes brought about by these, in comparison to other neighbouring tribes, are not so marked. Change in their material aspects of life is somewhat remarkable. Previously the Dimasa men used to wear handmade napkins. But nowadays, in most of the villages, this has been replaced by cheap mill-made clothes. Shirts bought from the market are largely used and the young boys, in particular, are very fond of readymade garments like half pants and shirts. Women, being somewhat conservative in this respect, use traditional hand made dresses. In some villages, of course, girls were found wearing readymade blouses of mill-made cloth.

This shift in their liking of dresses and more dependence on market goods have affected the weaving industry of the Dimasa. For the easy availability of thread at a comparatively cheaper rate in the market the Dimasa has almost given up spinning. Now with their increasing liking for readymade garments the weaving industry has confined itself to the production of female dresses only. As there is less demand for traditional varieties the indigenous art of dying has also gone out of use. This use of readymade clothes has a prestige-value among them. As people of nearby urban areas use mill-made dresses, the Dimasa enjoy an air of prestige by using the same kind of cloth. Thus these items are found to be used more for the sake of imitation than for any utilitarian purposes.

Among the Dimasa who live near a daily market, a considerable change has been noticed in their food habits as well. They try to make life more comfortable and enjoy having better food. They are often found buying fish, pulses, garments, and other articles of use from the daily market. As already indicated, they sometimes spend a considerable amount of money for buying ornaments. Girls, particularly, spend an important proportion of their earning in purchasing gold-plaited ornaments. though traditional Dimasa ornaments are still highly esteemed. In Haslong and Lumding young Dimasa

avail themselves of the service of saloons and this also adds to their prestige.

Though the exposure to market economy has changed the material aspects of the Dimasa life, as far as their drinking habits are concerned, the Dimasa still prefer their homemade *zu* to distilled liquor that is available in the market. The Dimasa are, rather, passionately attached to their homemade liquor.

It has already been stated that the Dimasa practise agriculture as the mainstay of their economy. Though in recent years the educated Dimasa are getting into government jobs the percentage is very low and even those who join do not continue to work there for long. The Dimasa feel somewhat out of place in such jobs, though such jobs increase one's social prestige considerably.

The schools, started by the district council are important agencies through which new ideas are infiltrated into the villagers. The teachers, mostly coming from the Bengalee community, are the harbinger of new ideas and customs. According to the Bengalee system of nomenclature the teacher enrolls girl students by the clan name of their father and this has led to the growing linking for using the surname of the father. The Bengalee teachers are introducing Bengalee names to the pupils also as the local names are too hard for them to pronounce. The Hindu goddess Saraswati (goddess of learning) is worshipped in each and every school of the area and villagers along with the students participate in this worship with great interest and earnest devotion. The teacher himself arranges everything for the worship and the villagers extend their assistance and cooperation and also bear the expenses that are required for the occasion. In Barawaphu village the teacher has also introduced the worship of the goddess Lakshmi (goddess of wealth and prosperity). It is observed that the Dimasa priest offers worship to Hindu gods like Dharmaraj, Indra along with their traditional gods. In this village the students have become intimately attuned to the Hindu devotional songs also, like *hari sankirtan*. Worship of the Hindu goddess Kali in the temple of Mahur (established by a local Bengalee) has become a very common feature among the



Dimasa of that locality. They also enjoy the Durgapuja of the local Bengalee community. In many villages basil leaves are used for preparing *dithar* (holy water). In the village of Sujiling people were found worshipping the Hindu god Satyanarayana. This is performed without any priest as their priest does not know the art of worship of the Hindu gods. This being a Hindu ceremony they simply offer flowers and fruits in accordance with Hindu custom. In the same village in a funeral ceremony a professional Hindu barber had been called in from the market for ritual shaving. These are some of the ways by which the Dimasa are incorporating elements of Hindu culture.

It is interesting to note here that though the Dimasa are surrounded by the Christian tribal groups they never embraced Christianity. This is probably because of their early contact with the Hindu and the conversion of the Dimasa king to Hinduism. They, however, enjoy the Christian festivals that are observed in the nearby villages. It is probably because of the influence of the neighbouring tribes that the Dimasa sometimes refer to the *busu* festival as *baradin*, which locally means the Christmas.

The spread of education is accelerating the contact and thus the rate of change. From the primary schools boys are sent to distinct towns for higher studies and thereby they come into further contact with people of varied cultures. The educated Dimasa elite have thus become liberal about the rigidity of their traditional custom. They do not maintain any severe strictness about matriclan taboos in towns as the social pressure there is comparatively imperceptible. It is often found that both the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are living in the same house though not in the same room. They also do not follow the rule of *minhabba* (residing in wife's house for one year after marriage).

Certain superficial changes have also been observed in the field of ritualistic behaviours of the Dimasa that are associated with the treatment of diseases. The first reaction of a Dimasa to fight a disease is to take recourse to supernatural means. Formerly they used to use indigenous herbs and worship the deities for curing diseases. Nowadays when the supernatural

aids do not give them the desired results they switch over to the application of modern medicines. Their increasing contact with the marketing centres and the district council offices has made them aware of the utility and effectiveness of modern medicines.

Sometimes the Dimasa are found to take medical aids from the quacks and from the supernatural agencies simultaneously. But owing to their natural fear of the plains people they do not like to go to the hospital. However, there is a growing tendency among the Dimasa for using modern medical aids. In Hajadisa village the priest himself once remarked that the rituals are essential though modern medicines are more essential for curing diseases. The villagers themselves are also quite skeptical about the effectiveness of the rituals in curing diseases. In the interior villages, however, where the contact with market or town is limited, the people still primarily depend on supernatural agencies for treatment of diseases. Even when the supernatural means of treatment meets with repeated failures the belief of the people in the power of the supernatural agencies remain firm and unchanged. When the modern medical aids are sought, in most of the cases they take that help at the eleventh hour. Naturally, in most cases this way of treatment also proves unsuccessful. This adds support to their belief in the indigenous medicine and way of treatment.

The Dimasa who live in the nearby towns and urban areas enjoy cinema shows more than their traditional means of amusement. They have preference for Hindi films and music. They are so much influenced by the cinema shows that in many Dimasa houses one can find framed pictures of popular film stars along with the pictures of the Hindu gods and goddesses. They also sometimes play the tune of Hindi film songs on their traditional flute.

As far as the changes in political aspects are concerned, before introduction of the district councils the Dimasa were more or less unaware of the national political situation. Though they enjoyed the right of adult franchise since the dawn of Independence, it was somewhat vague to them and they have never played any active role in the greater politics of the country. Their political activities were primarily limited to



the boundaries of their respective villages. Naturally when the district councils were introduced the Dimasa accepted it with great enthusiasm and many of them took active part in the election of the district council members.

Prior to such elections different political parties conducted extensive election campaigns in the tribal villages. This made the people aware, particularly of politics and thus many new political ideas made inroads among the Dimasa. There are at present quite a few political leaders among them who are well conversant with the political changes that are taking place at the national level. Some Dimasa elites are directly involved in politics now and sometimes few of them represent the cabinet of the state government. This greater involvement of the Dimasa leaders in politics makes the commoner also politically more conscious. However, party affiliation is still not very marked among the Dimasa. This was evidenced when the members of the Diphu District Council changed their party affiliation *en masse* in 1967. When they sought re-election all the members got re-elected.

Though changes are quite perceptible in certain spheres of the Dimasa culture, it is because of their somewhat conservative outlook, this could not touch the core of their culture. Whatever changes are found, they are hardly skin deep. The Dimasa attitudes and values, in general, have remained mostly unchanged.

In summing up, there are three main factors that are responsible for bringing about change in Dimasa life. These are contact with alien cultures, exposure to market economy, and the introduction of the district council offices. The impact of contact with the alien cultures on Dimasa life is somewhat non-significant, whereas exposure to market economy has brought about considerable change in the material aspects of their life. The introduction of the district council offices has also brought a great deal of changes in the political life of the Dimasa. This, along with their widening contact with the market economy is contributing to a better integration of the Dimasa with the national life.

## 8

### Postscript

Every culture is assumed to have a set of characteristic themes which reflect on and regulate various aspects of life of the people of that particular culture. The striking features of the Dimasa culture which pop up at the very outset and can be designated as its characteristic themes are harmony, uniform code of values between the sexes and a high sense of beauty.

The emphasis on harmony is so deep that it has penetrated into the very basic structure of the society. To the Dimasa every phenomenon of the universe can be understood in terms of harmonic union of *purusa* (male) and *prakriti* (female). The Dimasa elites use these very terms and even the non-literate explain the phenomenon unambiguously. This concept in Hindu philosophy generally operates at the ideological plane but finds popular expression in the day-to-day Dimasa life and activities.

The Dimasa society follows a uniform standard of values. Both sexes are considered equally responsible who bear the burden of the family jointly. They cooperate in every walk of life and share the failures and successes equally. This becomes evident when a child is born of extra-marital relationship. Both the parents share the responsibility of it according to their degree of involvement in the affair. It is important to note here that no Dimasa ever tries to evade the responsibility in this regard though he or she is aware of the punishment for such an act. The society is extremely careful in determining responsibility and punishing the offenders who are generally blacklisted for the rest of their lives. Even then



nobody considers it necessary to evade responsibility.

As already stated in the Dimasa society individual freedom is highly esteemed. As a result, even such cases where the man or woman is not willing to marry each other the society does not impose an unwanted marriage on them. The child, however, is treated humanely. No stigma is attached to him or her. As an individual he or she enjoys every privilege like other members of the society. The paternity of the child is never concealed who inherits both the patrilian and matrilian as usual.

May be the clearcut dichotomy of the Dimasa descent system is the expression of their emphasis on harmony. In many societies a parallel system of descent is observed where the role of one of the ancestors is ignored depending on the sex of the individual. Among the Dimasa, however, it is uniformly observed for both the sexes without any discrimination.

Most of the Dimasa relationships are based on trust. So, even a woman feels secure to move alone freely. Nobody thinks that his wife may abuse his trust and faith in his absence. Still there are cases of adultery, the proportion of which is extremely insignificant and the offenders of trust are severely looked down upon. The husband and wife are very much devoted to each other and it is very difficult to come across a case of desertion, though divorce is permitted in the society. In some rare cases when a wife leaves her husband or in the event of widowhood, she scarcely goes for remarriage. She prefers to live with her children.

Conjugal or consanguinal bonds are based on love and affection. Never is a wife or child beaten. A man when he becomes a father treats everyone with great tenderness. It is difficult not to quote a well known case in this connection. The headman, of Hajadisa village was an accomplished hunter and well known for this in the locality. Once, while shooting a deer the expression of the eyes of the deer reminded him of the eyes of his daughter. Though the deer was within his shooting range he did not kill the animal and then onwards gave up hunting for good and presented his gun to his younger brother.

Giving up hunting at a later age is a common factor among the Dimasa.

The Dimasa are a peace loving people. During my long field stay I never saw a man or woman quarrelling over any personal issue. It is difficult to recall any occasion when people were fighting or quarrelling even in a drunken condition. They may appear indifferent to the fellow villagers but are never harsh or cruel to one another. The Dimasa, thus have largely a stress free society. There was not a single case of suicide or murder among them in the recent past.

Competitive outlook on life whether for material gain or something else is not desired by the people. Wealth does not enhance prestige. As the society is devoid of any stratification it puts little emphasis on accumulation of wealth. Avariciousness, miserliness are considered negative qualities. If somebody accumulates wealth he is appreciated for his skilfulness but not granted any higher status. On the other hand, generosity and even lavish spending during any festive occasion is highly esteemed. It has been observed that most of the headmen spend almost half of their yield during festivals.

The Dimasa do not serve any other community and never beg for anything even from their near kin. If somebody cannot or does not like cultivation, he subsists on forest products for days together but will not go for any wage labour in the local market. Many a time they offered me free service but I could never think of employing one as servant on cash payment.

These people are very hospitable and extremely honest. They usually entertain guests with black tea and honey. Theft is observed even in the remotest village Semkhor. Theft is unknown to them. Many a times I observed people from neighbouring villages informing my informant that his banana field was ready for plucking or his vegetables were getting overmatured. But there were no reports of theft. The houses in the village are never locked even when the village remains almost deserted during day time as people go for outdoor work.

Another noticeable feature of the Dimasa culture is their feeling of oneness with nature. Nature and natural objects are very much living to them and these have an important role to



play in their material and spiritual life. As they live in the midst of forests, they also form a part of it. They consider that they share the same environment with the wild-life and the spirit-world. They are careful to maintain a policy of peaceful coexistence with them in various ways as they maintain the same with the people of neighbouring villages like the Naga or Kuki.

The Dimasa always keep their immediate surroundings clean. They are fond of daily bath irrespective of age and sex and thus their knowledge and practice of personal hygiene seems better in comparison to other tribes around them. Their artistic taste is depicted in their hand-made textile designs. The Dimasa have an immense treasure of folk-tales which are worth studying. Though their tunes are a bit monotonous, the lyrical part of it is of high quality having great human appeal. In short, the Dimasa culture is very harmonic and balanced without double standards of values. It stands for high morals which the human species so dearly cherish.

## APPENDIX—A

## COPIES OF COURT CASES

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To

The Judge,

Subordinate District Council Court

Sub : Discriminatory observance of customary practice dated the 24th June, 1963.

Sir,

We the undersigned on behalf of seven others of our village belonging to the Congress party beg to submit the following grievances for favour of your consideration and necessary action.

That from time immemorial the following practice has been observed with due solemnity. The meat of hind leg of animals killed in connection with the *sradh* or *bhandra* (*sradh* feast even when a man is still alive) of a male member of a certain *kisong* is given to all the women and the meat of the backbone to the male members of the same *kisong*.

In the case of *sradh* or *bhandra* of a married woman the recipients are the women and the men as are born of the *kisong* of her husband. The same distribution is made even in case of certain *pujas* in the *jhum* fields.

That since political dissensions have taken place in our village, this practice has been observed discriminately against nine of us—the two signatories and Sri Aisamten, Akand, Debom, Maibai, Naibangh, Samji, and Hamring all of whom married women born of the *kisong* of *bhonglosa* to which Sri Nambang belongs.



The following are the persons who did discriminate us :

1. Donjabeng, on the occasion of *sradh* of his wife late Dorbangdi.
2. Dongham, on the occasion of *sradh* of his son late Aben.
3. Thagrik, on the occasion of *sradh* of his wife late Donprangdi.
4. Bangsongdao, on the occasion of *sradh* of his father late Joka.
5. Indabuing, on the occasion of *sradh* of his late daughter.

The reason given is that we have forfeited our claim as we have joined the Congress party. That not to offer any man or woman who has the rightful claim amounts to refusal to recognise membership of the same *kisong* or clan. None but the king has the right to refuse recognition and this is a serious crime according to our customary law.

We, therefore, request that you will be pleased to make necessary action against the five persons of Semkhor village mentioned above and Shri Nambang who abetted the commission of offence. And for this act of kindness we shall ever pray.

Yours faithfully,

(L.T.I. of Thaibang Langthasa Thailo Langthasa.)

Order Sheet for Magistrate Record Distt.  
North Cachar Hills.

In the Court of the Judge, Subordinate District Council Court, Haflong  
Miscellaneous customary case no. 13 of 1963.  
Sri Thailo Langthasa, Complainant Thaibang Langthasa, Semkhor

vs

Sri Danjabeng and five other Accused, Semkhor

Serial No.	Orders	Signature of the Judge
7.6.1963		

DECISION

In holding all the five opponents guilty of breach of customary law prevalent among the community of the parties I consider it proper that at least the initiators of the trouble are to be penalized in some way or the other. Opponents Indabuing and Donjabeng are therefore sentenced to a fine of Rs 9/- each, while Dongham and other opponents are excused from penalties in view of the confusing circumstances created by their forerunners.

Opponents Indabuing and Donjabeng shall pay the fine by 14.8. '63. The amount of fine will go to the petitioners.

Sd/- J. Thaosen  
26.7.1963.

14.8.1963.

The two opponents who are ordered to pay the fine by to-day are present. They are given further time till 21.8.'63 by which they are to pay the fine unless they can obtain a stay order from the appellate court earlier.

Sd/- J.K. Thaosen  
14.8.1963

Stamp affixed Rs 1.00

In the Court of Judge, Appellate District Council Court,  
Haflong, North Cachar Hills

Sub : Appeal against the order of the judge, Subordinate District Council Court, dated, 26.7.'63, penalizing the appellants:



Sri Danjabeng and Sri -Indabuing of Semkhor— Appellants

vs

Sri Thailo Langthasa and Thaibang Langthasa and seven others of Semkhor village—complainant/Respondent

Misc. customary case no. 13 of 1963

The appellants beg to state herewith

1. That the order passed by the judge, Subordinate Distt. Council Court penalizing the appellants is impugnable.
2. That originally it was the complainant/respondents' party who first infringed the customary law of the society.
  - i) The party of Sri Thailo and Sri Thaibang were the first to noncooperate with us during *Cahrkhou jenba* (a ritual).
  - ii) Similarly they did not cooperate at the obituary rites at Derham's death.
  - iii) They repeated the same behaviour at the marriage of Arlung and Hamphele.
  - iv) They repeated the same thing at the marriage of Bele and Saile.
  - v) That it was they who first boycotted our *Daikhe tharba*, the social purificatory rite of our faith.
  - vi) It was they who first indulged to negate themselves from our united village society traditionally continuing since time immemorial.
  - vii) That it was their party who celebrated the *busu* festival separately boycotting the appellant's people.
3. Thus when such indulgence on the part of the complainants/respondents party continued without the least sign of regret and the matter became beyond tolerance to the appellant's people we in the village panchayat decided to let them have their own way, and we stopped interfering with their ways and occasions by doing against what they initiated to do and what they liked,—we mean we dissuaded ourselves

against infiltrating their group against their noncooperation by customary offerings and obeisance.

4. Hence this is an appeal against what our village panchayat decided upon. That vide Civil Revision case no. 15(H) of 1959 the Hon. Chief Justice H. Deka and Hon. Justice Mehretra of the High Court of Assam, pointed out that the District Council Court had no jurisdiction of the village panchayat. That the court can try cases of civil nature related to the tribal customary law and institutions.

No cases connected with the social customs and tribal institutions should, therefore, be tried as a criminal case at the first instance and penalize, as this case stands, without first referring the matter to the bigger social panchayat of Semkhor or other kinfolks. Hence it is *ultra vires* and irregular.

5. That even if the judge of the court is interested to try such a case personally, he could have done justice by trying the case with the help of a panel of neutral jury of Semkhor or other kinfolks, whom the learned judge could have consulted and their opinion and verdict asked for. Since for such a complex tribal institution the court can never claim any authority of the law nor have any statutory reference in their support, and hence true justice can never be accomplished.

6. That, under the above circumstances the case should have either been dismissed or referred to higher social body of village panchayat.

7. Besides, the learned judge, in course of his judgment admitted himself that the prima facie of the case on which the complainants/respondents based their ground are not compulsory and in most cases not possible to abide by or to oblige.

Thus besides being an omission of justice the order penalizing the appellants is contradictory in itself and unilateral and irregular.

Hence this appeal and pray for justice.

LTI	Indabuing
LTI	Danjabeng.



Order sheet for Magistrate's record  
 Subordinate District Council Court, North Cachar Hills  
 Miscellaneous appeal customary no. 5/63 of 1963.  
 Sri Danjabeng and others vs Shri Thailo and other eight  
 persons Respondents  
 Appeal accepted 16.8.'63

21.10.'63

Judgment of the lower court is upheld with the modification that instead of sentence with a fine of Rs 9/- the appellants were given strong warnings to abide by the customary rules and bindings prevalent among them.

The appellants are discharged.  
 LTI of Indabuing

D. Hojai  
 2.10.1963

To

The Judge, Subordinate District Council Court,  
 Haflong, North Cachar Hills.

Sub : Appeal against decision of Maibong Mouzadar in the matter of *longkhao garsenba* on attempt to attribute as witch.

Sir,

Most respectfully I beg to state that

1. the Maibong Mouzadar has imposed on me penalty of Rs 134/- on the charges that I placed *longkhao* on the eastern side Rabinanda's house.
2. that the complainant Rabinanda could not cite any witness to prove that the *longkhao* was put by me or anybody.
3. that the complainant could not show any reasons for my putting the *longkhao*. I had no bad relation with him. I have, instead, been helping him and even today he owes me money.
4. that the only reason for his suspicion was that I advised him to remove the *longkhao* before the knowledge of anybody.

5. that on the night before the *longkhao* was placed, the *puja* of witch was performed in the house of Tairung Hojai of my village.

6. that I wanted in the Court of Maibong Mouzadar to take oath myself to disprove the charges against me which was not allowed.

7. that this is a sheer injustice on the part of Maibong Mouzadar to have disallowed me to take oath.

8. that the Maibong Mouzadar's court did not record the statements of complainant and defendant. It has neither examined the case properly. It only gave a blunt verdict without regard to the common formalities and so my grievance remains unredressed.

Under the circumstance I most earnestly pray that you will graciously hear my appeal and do justice to me.

Yours faithfully,

Maibong  
 The 23rd Nov. 1963

Sd/- Barachand Langthasa  
 Purana Dukhaling

To

The Judge,  
 Subordinate District Council Court,  
 Haflong, North Cachar Hills.

Sir,

On behalf of four Kachari Mouzadars I beg to inform you that the accused Sri Barachand Langthasa, the *Gaonbura* of Purana Dukhaling village placed *sagainjik hoobani longkhau* (a split bamboo mat used while sacrificing an animal to the *sagainjik*) under the eaves of the house of Sri Rabinanda Seingyun of that village. By this it is implied that the witch to whom the sacrifice was made resided in that house or in other words some members (usually the housewife) of that family is the witch to whom sacrifice is made.

Sri Rabinanda-Seingyun brought the charge against Barchand Langthasa and the case was tried at Gidingpur village in the



house of Maibong Mouzadar on 16.11.'63. Both the petitioner and the opponent asserted that each of them to take oath in support of his own case, but the panchayat ordered the petitioner to take the oath against the opponent and the latter to pay a fine of Rs 50/- and the *ijjatadabi* (compensation for loss of prestige) of Rs 84/- as he committed an offence as per the Dimasa custom. The date fixed for taking the oath was 26.12.'63. Meanwhile, Sri Baimanta Langthasa, son of the accused, on behalf of his father, promised to pay Rs 84/- as compensation and wanted to get the case settled. He agreed to apologise to the panchayat. But the accused Sri Barachand Langthasa did not care to listen to the decision of the panchayat.

I therefore, request you to consider the case in accordance with our traditional Dimasa custom otherwise the prestige of the panchayat is at a stake and the tradition also become meaningless. Kind consideration on this matter is solicited.

Yours faithfully,

Dated, 23.11.'63  
Signature of the members  
of the panchayat.

Sd/- Jogendra Naiding  
Maibong Mouzadar

#### DECISION OF THE SUB-JUDGE

In view of the decision of the panchayat we have to remember that at first the act is anonymous which has less force than an act openly done. Secondly, the proof was obtained by an oath upon suspicion and not upon direct evidence. Though customarily accepted, it has by no means the force of the best evidence. In the circumstances it will not be wise to make the penalty on the opponent a heavy one.

The oath shall be taken on 22.2.'64 at the village of the parties as agreed by themselves, and thereupon the opponent shall pay a fine of Rs 50/- which amount will go to the petitioner by way of compensation for the embarrassment and loss of prestige suffered by his family.

15.1.1964

Sd/- J.K. Thaosen

Appeal done by Rabinanda Seingyun on 17.2.'64 to the District Council Court (Meanwhile Barachand Langthasa died before taking the oath).

Though the respondent is dead his eldest son Baimanta Langthasa who persuaded his father to make a compromise should now take the full responsibility on behalf of his deceased father. The appellant apprehends that unless final order of the court is executed and the slur on the appellant is removed by way of paying fine and compensation money etc., by the respondent or his legal heir the effect of placing *longkhao* at the house-premise of the appellant will continue to exist and the loss of family prestige will remain unredressed.

#### DECISION OF THE JUDGE

The appeal is accordingly dismissed on the ground that no case as the present one lies against a deceased party and it is further ordered that the appellant is given benefit of his agreement to take oath as attached to the order passed by the lower court and as a result the disputable social slur on the family of the appellant stands removed and no case on the same question will lie in future from either of the party. The case in original stands dismissed.

Sd/- D. Hojai  
17.2.1964.

To

The Judge,  
Subordinate District Council Court,  
North Cachar Hills, Haflong.

Sub : Non-payment of Compensation

Sir,

I beg most respectfully humbly and respectfully put forward the following grievance for your kind consideration and redress.

That, the buffaloes numbering about 30 belonging to Natun Kalachand village had destroyed my crop of this year entirely just before harvest. The paddy field that has been newly



reclaimed lies within our village boundary and is well fenced.

That, at first my crop was damaged by eight buffaloes that belong to Sri Dongprang Johari of Natun Kalachand. It was jointly investigated and a compensation of three and a half maunds of paddy was fixed. Then the crop was damaged for the second time and the matter was also enquired jointly in presence of the *mouzadar* of Kalachand, *Gaonbura* of Khejurbond, and other elderly persons of our village. It was also agreed upon that the amount of damage was heavy. It was decided that 12 maunds of paddy would be given to me as compensation by the villagers of Natun Kalachand.

That, according to the agreement reached at our joint discussion at the time of enquiry I approached the elderly persons of the villages [and requested them to pay the compensation. But they abruptly denied saying that all the villagers were not willing to pay the entire amount of compensation for the loss and they did not show any reason.

That, I have sufficient ground to believe from their very attitude that they will not pay the compensation as decided upon unless I am helped by the District Council authority.

I, therefore, request your kind honour to take up the matter sympathetically so that I may get the due compensation as decided by the *mouzadar* and for this act of your kindness I shall remain ever grateful.

Yours faithfully,

Dated, 16.1.'63

LTI of Uma Charan Karigabsa  
Vill. Khejurbond, Kalachand

Stamped affixed Re 1/-

ORDER SHEET FOR MAGISTRATE'S RECORD

District North Cachar Hills

In the Court of the Subordinate District Council Court,  
Haflong Misc. Customary number 7/63 of 1963.

Sri Uma Charan

Karigabsa of Khejurbond vs Sri Dongprang Johari of  
Natun Kalachand,

Complainant		Accused	
Sl. no.	Date	Orders	Signature of Presiding Judge

Item no. 11 Dt. 16.1.'63

Forward the case to the mouzadar of Kalachand for disposal at an early date.

Sd/- Judge 16.1.'63

Appeal by the Headman of Natun Kalachand against the decision of mouzadar.

Affixed Stamp of Rs. 1/-

To

The Judge,  
Subordinate District Council Court,  
North Cachar Hills, Haflong

Sir,

That, the complainant Sri Uma Charan Karigabsa of Khejurbond village cultivated wet paddy in a patch of land lying in between Khejurbond village and the Railway line. He filed a case against ourselves where he claimed that the buffaloes belonging to our village had destroyed the crop of that field and demanded compensation accordingly.

On this matter I put our grievance to your good self that our *mouzadar* wanted to have a mutual settlement of this case by paying eight maunds of paddy as compensation. But we have objection to pay the same. Because that particular land was the grazing land of both the villages. It is the traditional custom that no compensation would be paid for damage of production of *jhum* fields. That is why when few years ago Sri Duruman Langthasa of Waphu village demanded compensation for crop of mustered seeds—he was not paid. Similarly, the villagers of Chandpur prayed to Joybhadra Hagjer, the first MLA of the area, compensation for damage of crop from



the villagers of Khejurbond—but that was also rejected. Under such circumstances we cannot pay the compensation to Uma Charan for the sake of *mouzadar's* order only.

You please consider the matter of grazing of village buffaloes and if you think that it is necessary to pay the compensation we will pay the same. But the *mouzadar* is changing the village customs and is causing disputes and troubles in the village.

Therefore, I request to you to settle the case between ourselves by suggesting a better method of buffalo grazing in the Kalachand area.

Yours faithfully,

Dated : 28th Jan, 1963.

Sd/- Manan Jibragede  
Gaonbura of Kalachand.

To

The Judge,  
Subordinate District Council Court,  
North Cachar Hills, Haflong.

Sir,

This is for your information that as per order of your honour I have discussed the matter of compensation of Uma Charan Karigabsa in our council. I have requested the buffalo-owners of Natun Kalachand through the *Gaonbura* of my village to attend the council meeting. But they did not appear before the council.

However, in our meeting it has been decided that the buffalo-owners of Natun Kalachand have to pay fifteen and a half maunds of paddy as compensation to Uma Charan and the date of payment is fixed on Feb. 9, '63.

Yours faithfully,

Rasendra Kachari  
Mouzadar, Kalachand  
29.1.1963

The names of the  
members of the village  
council who were present  
is attached herewith.

### DECISION OF THE COURT

From the liability of compensation in case of damage by cattle as mentioned above is that during the crop season when the cattle will be impounded, they will graze mainly in these areas and as such it will be difficult to protect the crops raised in those places in spite of fencing and therefore, the villagers are discouraged from cultivating those places and when they cultivate—they do so with full risk of their own. This is a commonsense matter. Mere change in denomination, i.e. cultivating wet paddy instead of jhum paddy in the same spot and all other circumstances remaining the same does not, to my mind make any difference, so far as the question of compensation is concerned. Therefore, without making any change in the said rules about compensation prevailing in the area, no compensation can lie for petitioner's loss of crops raised in the land which is within the village fencing and near the village as well. Claim rejected.

Sd/- (Subordinate Judge)  
20.2.1963.

Stamp affixed 75 np.

To

The Judge,  
Subordinate District Council Court,  
Haflong, N.C. Hills.

Dated : Maibong, the 16th  
May, 1963.

Sub : Reminder

Sir,

Most humbly and respectfully I beg to state that according to judicial laws it was settled in the court that six maunds of paddy as compensation should have been paid to me by the villagers of Natun Kalachand and 50% of the same will be



realised from Sri Dongprang Johari of the same village. I have also demanded the compensation from them many times. But the other buffalo owners of the village did not like to pay the same. I have realised compensation from Dongprang Johari only. So I request to your honour to realise the said 50% compensation from the other buffalo-owners of the aforesaid Natun Kalachand.

I therefore pray that you would be kind enough to consider and solicit to take action about the matter and arrange to release the said compensation dues from other buffalo owners of Natun Kalachand as prayed, for which act kindness I shall remain ever grateful.

Yours faithfully,

LTI Charan Kanaga Saha  
villager, Khejibond, Kalachand.

- 1. a) Write a short note on system analysis.
- b) Write a short note on geomagnetism.
- c) Define the term 'meander' and describe the basic character of entrenched meander.
- d) Discuss the importance of soil pedology.
- e) Write a short note on characteristics of monsoon forests.
- 2. a) Discuss the importance of failure of monsoon on agro-climatic zone.
- b) Discuss the importance of movements and characteristics of air masses and explain their effect on the weather.
- c) Discuss the importance of cyclones and explain their effect on the weather.
- 3. a) Discuss the importance of the ocean deposits and give a brief account of the same.
- b) Explain the importance of the submarine relief of the Atlantic Ocean. Give examples.
- c) Comment on the Hadley and the oceanic circulation system.
- 4. a) Classify soils of the world and discuss the distribution and characteristics of each.
- b) Discuss the soils profile
- c) Define the term biome. List the terrestrial biomes and describe the characteristics of Savanna biome.

The respondent filed a petition to the sub-judge protesting the order of the mouzadar to be unjustified and in violation of prevalent customary rules of the locality and seeking justice from the court thereupon the lower court reversed the order as a miscellaneous compensation case and heard before itself but the claim of the appellant for compensation was found not admissible in view of prevalent customs of the locality and the claim was accordingly rejected by the lower court. Hence this appeal.

I consider that (6) maunds of paddy will be quite reasonable compensation of the loss sustained by the appellant and I accordingly allow appellant's claim for compensation at 6 (six) maunds of paddy of which 50% will be paid by the respondent and 50% by other buffalo owners of Natun Kalachand through the *Gabura* of the village within 15 (fifteen) days on the date of this order.

Sd/ D. Hojai

Umacharan Choudhury, Advocate

Umacan Choudhury, Advocate

Umacan Choudhury, Advocate

Umacan Choudhury, Advocate

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Umacan Choudhury, Advocate

Umacan Choudhury, Advocate

- 5. a) Write short notes on 'Floristic Kingdoms, based on their global distribution.
- b) Critically examine the changing perspectives on the concept of real differentiation.
- c) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- d) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- e) Write short notes on 'Floristic Kingdoms, based on their global distribution.
- 6. a) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- b) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- c) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- 7. a) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- b) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- c) Discuss the importance of regional planning and development.
- 8. a) Examine the validity of the 'Central place theory' in the context of population pressure and migration.
- b) Critically examine the 'Central place theory' in the context of population pressure and migration.
- c) To what extent are the heartland and rimland theories helpful in understanding the world political situation today? Express your opinion clearly.



Waibang Sing was a married man and had five children. Kharphandi was an unmarried woman of 40 years old. She had an affair with Waibang Sing and gave birth to a male child in June 1959. The village council called both of them for trial in July 1959. In addition to the members of Throkalongkher village council, the *sarkari gaonbura* and other village elders of Hajadisa were called to try the case. The council gave both the parties the opportunities of self defence. From their version it was established that Kharphandi invited the man in her house and provoked him for sex indulgence. Both the parties were found guilty and the man was fined by Rs. 50/- and the woman was fined by Rs. 15/-. Further the man was asked to pay Kharphandi a lump sum of Rs. 50/- for rearing the child. But she did not accept that amount. At this Waibang Sing expressed his desire to divorce his legal wife and marry Kharphandi. The council did not grant the divorce.

Case No. 3 : *Case of Adultery*

Sri Waibang Sing of Throkalongkher village

vs

Srimati Mabjarung of Throkalongkher village

Mabjarung is a widow and she is the wife's younger sister of Waibang Sing. The woman reported that she was raped by Waibang Sing in the watch hut of the *jhum* field and as a result conceived. This happened in 1959. Waibang Sing admitted his guilt. He was fined by Rs. 50/- and had to pay an additional sum of Rs. 50/- for rearing the child.

## APPENDIX B

### LIST OF SENGFONG (PATRICLAN)

Sl. No.	Name of Sengfong	Meaning
1.	Adaosa	Not known
2.	Baderbagia	"
3.	Batarisa (Bodosa)	"
4.	Daliyasanta	Name of a river
5.	Daudunglangtha	Son of a bird
6.	Daudungsa	Son of a kind of bird
7.	Daulagajaosa	Son of a red cock
8.	Daulagoposa	Son of a white cock
9.	Diphusa	Name of a river
10.	Disausa	"
11.	Gorlosa	Not known
12.	Haflongfansa (a Naga word)	Big Mound
13.	Hagjersa	Intermediary
14.	Hakmusa	Kidnapped
15.	Haphilasa	Not known
16.	Hasnusa	Sand
17.	Hojaisa	Son of a priest
18.	Jibragedesa	Big confluence
19.	Johorisa	Not known
20.	Jrãmbusa	"
21.	Karigabsa	Alkaline ash
22.	Kersa	Not known
23.	Khempraisa	"
24.	Lafthaisa	Small gourd
25.	Lamphusa	Hole in the way
26.	Langthasa	Son of a naked man
27.	Laobangdisa	Not known
28.	Londisa	"



<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Sengfong</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
29.	Longmailaisa	Pebbles
30.	Maibangsa	Plenty of Paddy
31.	Mitherfansa	Not known
32.	Nabingsa	Son of an angler
33.	Naidingsa	Son of a scout
34.	Nonisa	Not known
35.	Parbasa/Girisa	Hill or mountain
36.	Phonglosa	Son of a fat man
37.	Phurusa	Full
38.	Raiusa	Son of a swimmer
39.	Seingyunsa	Big sword
40.	Surungfansa	Not known
41.	Thaosensa	Son of a oil smearer
42.	Woarisa	Cutting a tree.

## LIST OF JADDI (MATRICLAN)

<i>Sl No.</i>	<i>Name of Jaddi</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
1.	Againaju	Not known
2.	Anumajilu	One who first suckles the baby
3.	Bairingma	Not known
4.	Banglaima	A kind of fever
5.	Banglaima dauga	"
6.	Buguma	"
7.	Desrikni	"
8.	Draingsongma gedeba	"
9.	Draingsongma Khasiba	Not known
10.	Gachauma	One who suffers from sore
11.	Gorni	Not known
12.	Hamlaigimindi	A kind of fruit
13.	Hamthaidi	Not known
14.	Kalachanma	Name of a locality
15.	Longmaisajilu	A kind of paddy
16.	Madaima	Mother of God
17.	Maibong gojodi	Plenty of paddy

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of Jaddi</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
18.	Mairangma	Mother of paddy
19.	Mairongma dauga	Not known
20.	Miungma	Mother of an elephant
21.	Miungma dauga	Not known
22.	Pakhaju	"
23.	Panthaobarjilu	Jackfruit
24.	Pasaidi	Not known
25.	Rajama	Mother of king
26.	Ranima	Mother of queen
27.	Sagaodi	Not known
28.	Saidima	"
29.	Saidima dauga	"
30.	Saikhudi	One who cleans rice
31.	Samder Sagaodi	Not known
32.	Thaliju	"
33.	Tharaju	"
34.	Yamthaidirao	"



## APPENDIX C

### DIMASA SONGS

#### SONG OF JHUM CULTIVATION

*(Sung while clearing the jungle for preparing the jhum field)*

Boys : The annual cycle is moving on and  
the season (for cultivation) has returned.  
Spending time in idleness and sleep  
will not pay.  
The night has ended and  
the day has dawned.  
Let us go to cut bamboo and  
exploit the forest.

Girls : While coming back after cutting bamboo  
bring me a pair of *thuri* (shuttle).  
While coming back after clearing jungle  
get me a pair of *halaisa* (bobin)

Boys : We shall make *thuri*  
but alas we have no sister to use them.  
we shall make *halaisa* too  
but alas we have no fiance to use it.

*(Sung while sowing)*

Don't lament as the summer days are long  
days are long to help the youth at work.  
Time has changed, boys  
Let us rush to the field.  
The sun is just above our head.  
Let us have lunch that our mother gave.  
The sun sets for the day.  
Let us go back.  
Let us return to our parents' house  
For the father we have to collect banana leaves.

## APPENDICES

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For the mother we have to collect fire wood.  
These must be taken as they are poor.

*(Sung while weeding)*

Boys : I have got no cloth in long summer day  
I am an unlucky chap  
I have no cloth.  
I have to work without a cloth in such a hot day.

Girls : Why would you be an unlucky chap ?  
Those who are lucky also do work in the same way.  
Why do you lament ?  
Those who have to work with spade have to  
take this hardship.  
Don't be sorry.

*(Sung while harvesting)*

Boys : The breeze is blowing gently,  
perhaps our sisters are moving their fans,  
Cold water drops are being sprinkled;  
perhaps our fiances are drying their hair.

Girls : Where are your sisters moving their fans ?  
The breeze is coming from the high mountain.  
Where are your fiances drying their hair ?  
The water is being sprinkled from the  
fountain on the hill top.

#### *Nodrang Song*

When the night is deep  
get sleep, sleep, sleep.  
Don't move along a dangerous way.  
At midnight the tree stumps may appear as a  
furious tiger.  
A rope can also appear as a snake.  
If you walk along at night  
a burning torch may fall on your head  
or at least a door stick.  
Roads at night may appear so high that  
turbans slip down while looking.



Waterways at night are so deep that  
 garlands slip down to look at.  
 Your impatience will earn  
 a bad name in the whole of Assam.  
 Your bad deeds will reach the enemies.  
 Oh dear young friends,  
 Beware not to walk at night.  
 Get sleep, sleep, and sleep.  
 And dream, dream, and dream.

*Love Song*

Boys : Oh damsel, your face is as beautiful as the moon.  
 No matter whether I am in Assam or in the  
 land of the Muslims,  
 Your face remains ever engraved in my heart.

Girls : If you are really a man destroy the hornets  
 without using fire.  
 And don't get killed by a Naga spear.

Boys : If I go to Assam, don't worry,  
 I will go there only to bring money.

Girls : If you go to Assam you will find  
 many beautiful Assamese girls and forget me.

Boys : I may come across many beautiful girls,  
 but none will be more suitable as my wife  
 than yourself.

*Busu Song*

By god's grace we have got  
 these day and night after a long time,  
 This day cannot be judged  
 in terms of gold and silver.  
 Fellow youth ! don't worry,  
 do whatever you like.  
 Dance as much as you can.

*An Ordinary Song*

I am a lonely orphan work in the field of another.  
 Other children, instead, spend days in

sports and games.  
 I roam from jungle to jungle and  
 pluck leaves throughout the day.  
 Other children, instead, spend days in  
 sports and games.  
 I will have a better life in the next birth  
 I cannot stand so much suffering.  
 I don't know why do I suffer so much.  
 I don't know how I was born  
 I don't know what has happened to me.  
 I have too many worries.  
 I don't know what has happened to me.  
 I will not stay here I have so much worries.  
 I will leave this place.  
 I will go far away.

*Farewell to Maibong*

Maibong, my motherland, vast in length  
 and breadth;  
 It is a six month's journey from either side.  
 Here fruit grows more than leaves and  
 the water is so good that there are more  
 fishes than pebbles.  
 If we leave Maibong, our motherland  
 it will be covered by jungle.  
 Deer will roam about here and  
 the river will be occupied by a giant fish.



APPENDIX D  
RITUALS AND WORSHIP OF DIMASA GODS

Sl. No.	Ritual Worship	Time	Place	Name of deities	Sex of the deity	Sacrificial objects	Other objects	Purpose	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Gerba	Friday night and Monday night during busu in Dec/Jan	Out skirt of village	Goddess	Female	Eggs (12) Goat (1) Cock (1)	—	For the welfare of the entire village at the end of the busu.	Observed once every year. Out- siders and females are not allowed to the place of worship. Foods offered are not taken by the devotee. On illness of any baby.
2.	Worship of Thaibar	Morning	Forest	Thaibar	-do-	Hen, Egg	—	For cure of the ailing baby.	

AMONG THE DIMASA OF ASSAM

APPENDICES

3.	Worship of Khandisa	Morning	Forest	Khandisa	Female	Hen, egg, rice-beer	Jewellery of mother, garments of father and mother, hair- oil, comb and other articles.	For cure of the ailing baby.	Jewelleries and garments etc., are taken back after completion of the worship. Observed on illness of any baby.
4.	Sani worship	Night	House	Sani	Male	Hen (1) Pigeon (1)	Vegetable curry	For strength and general health.	
5.	Masai Kanaodi	Sunday, Friday, Wednesday night	River bank	Masai Kanaodi	Female	Cock (1)	—	For curing fever.	Females are not allowed to the place of worship.
6.	Sandakano	-do-	In front of house	Sandakano	-do-	Hen (1)	—	-do-	-do-
7.	Lankhosa	Wednesday night	-do-	Lankhosa	-do-	Egg (2) Hen (1)	—		Females can- not participate.



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8.	<i>Tautila-kisim</i>	Night except Thursday and Monday	In front of house	Tautila-kisim	Female	Hen (1) Egg (2)	—	For curing of sickness	Females are allowed to participate.
9.	<i>Maiopha</i>	—do—	—do—	Maiopha	—do—	Hen (1) Egg (2)	—	—do—	—do—
10.	<i>Madaita-khan</i>	Daytime Wednesday, Friday	Jungle	Madaita-khan	Male	Cock (5) Hen (4) Egg (1)	Rice-beer <i>thaopari</i> (lamp) <i>khambali</i> (garland) New cloth (1) Rupee (1)	—do—	Cloth and the rupee are for the priest who cannot take any food till the worship is over. Offered foods cannot be taken into house.
11.	<i>Shegain-lambra</i>	Afternoon any day	On way to river	Shegain-lambra	Female	Hen (1) Egg (2)	<i>thaopari karma</i> (stinging plant)	For cure of sore and pain.	Females are not allowed to participate. Speaking with non-participants is not allowed.
12.	<i>Panaika-chu</i>	Afternoon	On bank of river	Panaika-chu	Male	Hen (1) Egg (1)	—	For cure of cold and cough.	—do—

13.	<i>Titaju</i>	Morning anyday	River side	Gods and Goddesses of Manja Daiko	—	Cocks (3) Hens (2) Duck (1)	<i>thaopari</i> (5) New cloth to priest	For general welfare.	Observed once every year. The priest has to fast till completion of worship. Females are not allowed to participate.
14.	<i>Ranthaoiya</i>	Morning	—do—	Gods and Goddesses of Alu Daiko	—	—do—	<i>thaopari</i> (5)	—do—	Observed once every year. Females are not allowed to participate.
15.	<i>Hawai-lamma</i>	—do—	—do—	Hawai-lamma	—do—	Cock (1) Hens (2)	<i>thaopari</i> (3) Areca nut (1) Betel-leaf (1)	For cure of sickness.	Females are not allowed to participate.
16.	<i>Kanchu</i>	—do—	On the way where there is only one tree	Kanchu	Female	Egg (1) Hen (1)	—	For cure of pain in ankle, waist.	Females are not allowed to participate. Egg or hen cannot be taken. Priest will spear an arrow in the tree and will observe fast.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17.	<i>Shegaiju</i>	Night	In front of house	Seven sisters : Heremdi, Raneglaidi, Ranthadi, Kherawdi, Bhempadi, Sanghumdi, Karphangdi. God of River	Female	Black goat (1) Fowls (2) Eggs (12) Fish	Vegetable curry	For general welfare of the family and protection from evil spirits.	Observed once every year. Foods offered are thrown away outside the village.	
18.	<i>Mal</i>	Morning Tuesday, Friday, Saturday (Jan.-Feb.)	River side	God of River	Male	Cook (1)	<i>thaopari</i> (1) Rice (uncooked) Areca nut (1) Betel-leaf <i>khambali</i> (2) <i>thaopari</i> (2) Rice-beer, Rice (uncooked) vegetables of land, Betel-leaf (1) Betel nut (1)	For general welfare of the family.	Observed once every year. Female can join and foods offered brought into house.	
19.	<i>Nowi-madai</i> =House <i>Madai</i> = God i.e. household god	Morning	In front of house	<i>Madai</i>	—do—	—do—	—do—	—do—	Observed annually. Members of different clans cannot join. None can speak at the time of worship. Every family member can join the worship.	
20.	<i>Hagrani</i>	Morning except Monday and Tuesday	Jungle	<i>Hagrani</i> (Sylvan God)	—do—	Cocks (2) Black Goat (1)	Rice Rice-beer <i>khambali</i> (2) <i>thaopari</i> (1)	For safety and security in jungle.	Annual	

## APPENDIX E

## CASE STUDIES OF A FEW WORSHIPS

## CASE I

Worship of Khandisa  
Sex of the deity : female  
Place : forest  
Time : morning  
Village : Seingyunpur  
Purpose : to cure a baby  
Materials : hen, rice-beer.

Amita was the only daughter of Bidyanan. From the age of the eight month she was suffering from swelling of limbs. Bidyanan approached Laimuni, the medicine man of the village for divination. Laimuni suggested that Khandisa, the goddess for the welfare of the baby should be propitiated for recovery of Amita.

The headman Jayman Seingyun was the priest of the village. He offered worship to Khandisa on one morning in the forest in the following way.

*Method*

Bidyanan and his wife took Amita to the place of worship. The priest was also accompanied by his wife. Few elderly persons gathered there. The priest and the parents of the baby observed fast till the ceremony was over. Two branches of Khandisa tree were planted as the symbol of the goddess and her husband. Two miniature cloths one for the goddess and one for her husband were put on those branches. Then the priest gave all the ornaments, hair oil and comb of Amita's mother and the garments of her father as offerings to the deities in order to please them. The priest then made a symbolic baby by rolling a piece of cloth and that was also offered to the deity. The offering of baby signifies that it is no more their baby. Being gracious the deity may return the baby to its parents.



Then the priest sacrificed a hen and offered fried egg and rice-beer to the altar of the deity with some incantations. Gunaram Seingyun, the elderly man of the village prepared the curry of that sacrificed hen and that curry was also offered. After that all the people present there including the priest consumed consecrated meat and drank rice-beer.

Then the priest returned the ornaments, hair oil, garments, etc., to the parents of the baby and some ornaments made of cane and flowers were put to the branches of *khandisa* tree. The image of the baby was also taken back and it was given to the wife of the priest. With this baby and Amita she departed for the village. The priest, the parents of the baby and other people followed her. At the entrance of the village the priest's wife waited for them and returned Amita to her parents. She told "the Goddess has given back your Amita to me. Now you, the parents take care of the baby properly."

After this ceremony also Amita did not show any improvement. Her condition was deteriorating day by day. Bidyanan offered the same worship again after two months. But she did not recover. She suffered for one and a half months more and then died.

#### CASE 2

##### Worship of Sani.

Sex of the deity : male

Place : Maiphin's house and forest

Time : evening and morning

Materials : One hen, two pigeons, and rice-beer

Purpose : to avoid accident

Village : Barawaphu.

Desron was a healthy young boy. He had been suffering from headache regularly since early 1965. Besides, he met with a number of accidents during that year, mainly while cutting trees or climbing small hillocks. At the beginning his father Maiphin considered this as a matter of simple headaches and accidents. When Desron was badly injured after an accident,

his father investigated the reason through the aid of a medicine man. The medicine man detected that it was the god Sani who was causing troubles to the boy and the god should be propitiated to avert accidents. Accordingly, Maiphin called a priest to worship the god for the welfare of his son.

##### Method

The worship was held one evening in the house of Maiphin. The priest placed a sacrificial dagger on the ground and lightly anointed a hen with mustard oil and water. Uttering some incantations he then offered the hen to the deity. Next he offered two pigeons in the same way. Then the priest with folded hands chanted some incantations in the name of the deity Sani. Then after removing the dagger he expressed the cause of accidents in the following way :

Before the boy was born as Desron his soul was wandering in the air. It was too much interested to have rebirth in the world as human being and entreated the god repeatedly to send him again in the world. At this the god enquired about the reason of his going back to the world. He wanted rebirth for earthly comfort and happiness. At this the god again questioned him, "You would enjoy the life there but what's that good to me? What you would pay me for this?" The boy promised him that after being reborn he would offer him hen, pigeon etc., at his young age. At this the god suggested him that his father should give him all these things on behalf of him during his childhood days.

Incidentally when the boy was born he could not remember the promise that he made to the god. The god waited so long and at last being disappointed caused troubles to him for the last one year just to make him conscious about his promise.

After narrating the story the priest again started offering prayers to the deity for about twenty minutes. This time he uttered the name of Dharmaraja, Indra, Bhim and Sani and requested them to save Desron from troubles. He prepared vegetable curry and rice-beer which were offered to the deity over three leaf plates. Then the consecrated food (curry and rice-beer) was served to all the relatives invited to attend the worship.



The following day very early in the morning the hen and pigeons were sacrificed in the midst of the forest. The sacrificed birds were cooked there by the priest and consumed by all the people present there. Since then Desron had no headache or accidents.

## CASE 3

Worship of Shegainlambra  
Sex of the deity : Female  
Place : on the way to the river  
Time : afternoon  
Purpose : to cure disease  
Village : Semkhor.

Outwardly the boy Bali had an excellent health. He was studying in class seven in the Haflong High School. One of his relatives being attracted by his intelligence brought him to Haflong for higher education in a secondary school. After two years of stay at Haflong he suffered from an acute pain in the chest. After some preliminary medical treatment he was sent back to his parents in the village.

*Method*

After a proper divination Bali's father arranged the worship of the spirit of Shegainlambra. Worship was offered by the priest in the afternoon on the way to the river. The offerings consisted of a hen and two eggs. Besides, the priest lit a lamp (*thaopari*). A *karma* (a kind of stinging plant) was planted there as the symbol of the spirit. Fried egg and cooked meat were also offered to her with some incantations and the rest of the consecrated food was eaten by the people present there. Bali also ate this food. Nobody talked with the non-participants (like the author) while the worship was going on.

After this Bali did not have any pain for several months and he again joined the school at Haflong. But he became too much susceptible to cold and the pain reappeared. This time he got admitted into the Haflong hospital. The doctors diagnosed the disease as a case of enlarged heart and there was no arrangement of its treatment in that small hospital. They treated

him with a few injections and antibiotics for temporary relief from pain and suffocation. Henceforth Bali could not go to school as he had acute pain and a suffocating feeling quite often. So, he was sent back to the village permanently.

His father arranged worship of various deities and spirits like Madaitakhan and Panaikachu. These were male deities. The former one was worshipped in a jungle on Wednesday with egg, rice-beer, lamp, garland (*khambali*). In this ritual a piece of new cloth and one rupee were given to the priest. The priest had to observe fast till the worship was over. Besides five cocks and four hens were sacrificed in the name of the deity. In this case also meat was cooked by the priest and served to the people present there. The latter deity was worshipped in the afternoon on the river bank by offering eggs and sacrificing a hen.

Bali is still suffering. Sometimes he comes to the hospital. After two years treatment the doctors gave up all hope of his recovery but his father still believes that Bali may come round through the observance of different worships of various deities and spirits. At present he is increasing the number of sacrificial animals and eggs gradually (during the author's stay the number of eggs exceeded sixty hoping against hope for a miraculous recovery).



## Glossary

Kinship terms, names of village officials and months have been listed in various tables of the book. Clan names appear in appendix B and list of rituals appear in appendix D. So, they have not been included in the glossary.

<i>Dimasa terms</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>akhi</i>	puffed rice
<i>anuma</i>	surrogate mother
<i>baidima</i>	Dimasa dance
<i>baimagam</i>	Naga dance
<i>bangfong</i>	bier
<i>banji</i>	barren
<i>baradin</i>	Christmas
<i>bese</i>	soul
<i>biba</i>	a system of obtaining gratis labour
<i>bigha</i>	an area of land
<i>busu</i>	harvest festival
<i>busugaba</i>	homage to the elders
<i>daikho</i>	shrine of area god
<i>dainya</i>	apprentice priest
<i>damra</i>	heaven
<i>dauga</i>	an honorific term associated with clan names
<i>dithar</i>	holy water
<i>garain</i>	sterile
<i>garao</i>	ceremonial father
<i>garyaba</i>	ceremonial mother
<i>gerba</i>	village worship
<i>githi</i>	impotent
<i>harang baiba</i>	long jump
<i>haroamunoba</i>	reciprocal exchange of labour
<i>harisankirtan</i>	Hindu devotional songs

## GLOSSARY

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<i>hachong</i>	a kind of evil spirit
<i>hagusujaba</i>	parturition
<i>izzat dabi</i>	prestige value
<i>jaddi</i>	matriclan
<i>jadu</i>	magic
<i>jamin</i>	surety
<i>janthai</i>	priest
<i>jhum</i>	slash and burn type of cultivation
<i>karma</i>	a kind of stinging plant
<i>khalti</i>	bride-price
<i>khambali</i>	garland
<i>kharam</i>	drum
<i>kharaorao</i>	village council
<i>khel</i>	area
<i>khilimfy</i>	blessings
<i>khudisa</i>	small spade
<i>kisong</i>	subclan
<i>lauthai</i>	a container made of small bottle gourd
<i>longthailamba</i>	stone throw
<i>maislaoba</i>	interest free loan of food grains
<i>malahoja</i>	female president of the annual harvest festival committee
<i>minhabba</i>	one year period of stay at the bride's place after marriage
<i>mouza</i>	a revenue village
<i>muri</i>	flute
<i>nagahoja</i>	male president of the annual harvest festival committee
<i>nanadihangba</i>	bringing the new born baby outside
<i>nodrang</i>	bachelor's dormitory
<i>phangsla</i>	reception gate
<i>phatri</i>	a special kind of priest
<i>rangdon</i>	a measuring basket
<i>romanalaiba</i>	test of strength by pushing a piece of bamboo at each other
<i>sagainjik</i>	witch
<i>samaidangba</i>	oath or ordeal
<i>sengfong</i>	patriclan
<i>sengjaodi</i>	assistant midwife



<i>simung</i>	spirit
<i>sishong</i>	billhook
<i>sunghi</i>	sickle
<i>sunghisa</i>	small sickle
<i>supen</i>	small flute
<i>thaopart</i>	lamp
<i>thuri</i>	a part of loom
<i>topang kharam</i>	a harp like instrument made of reed
<i>zu</i>	rice-beer

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